

**Statements and Reports of
the Methodist Church
on
Faith and Order**

**Volume Two
1984-2000**

Part One

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PREFACE

The last sentence of the Preface to the first edition of what was then called *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* expressed the hope that papers of this kind would, in future, be made available every few years. Since the publication of the *Statements*, a huge amount of material concerning the faith and order of the Church has been presented to the Conference by the Faith and Order Committee and other bodies, and this post-1983 material now appears as *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, Volume 2, 1984-2000*. The earlier volume has been revised and reset, and becomes *Volume 1*.

It should be noted that the term 'Statement', once used fairly generally, has in recent years acquired a specific meaning. It denotes 'a document intended to be a considered Statement of the judgment of the Conference on some major issue or issues of faith or practice, and framed with a view to standing as such for some years'. Some documents in both volumes were 'received' or 'noted', rather than 'adopted', by the Conference, and, in *Volume 1*, the fact that a document is described as a 'Statement' is not necessarily an indication that it enjoyed the special status now implied by this word. For this reason, both volumes are now entitled *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*. In fact the only Statement, in the present sense of the word, to appear in *Volume 2* is *Called to Love and Praise*.

A few of the reports in this volume were presented to the Conference by bodies other than the Faith and Order Committee, though that Committee produced the vast majority of the reports which follow. They are no longer the property of the Faith and Order Committee (or of other presenting bodies), but of the Conference itself.

In *Volume 2*, the resolutions which accompanied each report are reproduced as they appeared in the Conference *Agenda*, although such original designations as '10/3' and 'J1', meaningless out of context, have been removed. When resolutions were actually presented to the Conference in an amended form so as to correct an error or to make good an omission, it is the amended form which is given in this volume. Unless a note indicates otherwise, the resolutions were adopted by the Conference in the form printed here.

No attempt has been made to standardize the spellings employed in the various reports. In some, the reader will find 'baptise' or 'judgement' and in others, 'baptize' or 'judgment', for example. Typographical errors, where detected, have been corrected.

One significant piece of work, which engaged the Faith and Order Committee for the best part of a decade during the period covered by *Volume 2*, was the preparation of *The Methodist Worship Book*. That book, adopted and authorized by the Conference of 1998, is itself a significant document, illustrative and representative of the faith and order of the Methodist Church, a source to be read alongside these reports.

Neil Dixon
Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee (1988-2000)
June 2000

1 The Church

Blank

CALLED TO LOVE AND PRAISE (1999)

The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are.

Join us, in one spirit join,
Let us still receive of thine;
Still for more on thee we call,
Thou who fillest all in all!

Closer knit to thee, our Head;
Nourish us, O Christ, and feed;
Let us daily growth receive,
More and more in Jesus live.

Move, and actuate, and guide:
Divers gifts to each divide;
Placed according to thy will,
Let us all our work fulfil;

Sweetly may we all agree,
Touched with softest sympathy:
Kindly for each other care;
Every member feel its share.

Many are we now and one,
We who Jesus have put on:
There is neither bond nor free,
Male nor female, Lord, in thee!

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all!

Charles Wesley

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SECTION I: THE BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND CONTENTS OF THE STATEMENT

- 1.1.1 What is the Church and what is it for? What are its origins, its defining characteristics and its boundaries? What distinctive features does the Methodist Church have? Questions such as these provide the agenda for this statement of Methodist ecclesiology.¹ It is now more than sixty years since the document, *The Nature of the Christian Church*,² was adopted by the British Methodist Conference in 1937. The very different situation of the Church in the 1990s warrants a new Statement. This does not mean that the earlier Statement must now be contradicted, but simply that there are new things to be said in a context very different from that of sixty years ago. We begin by looking briefly at that context.
- 1.2.1 In recent decades the world has undergone vast changes. In Britain and most of Western Europe, the Churches are part of fast-changing, pluralist societies, in which materialism and signs of both spiritual impoverishment and widespread interest in spiritual things can be seen. Most people are much better off materially than sixty years ago. This increased affluence, and its accompanying stress on individual freedom, has deeply shaped the ethos of western democracies, with results both good and bad. At the same time, substantial minorities have had little or no share in this greater prosperity.
- 1.2.2 Britain, like other European countries, has become much more racially mixed since the Second World War, with an increasing number of second-generation black and Asian people for whom this country is home. Minority ethnic groups are heavily represented among the economically disadvantaged. Institutionalized racism is a reality, and difficult to combat not least because the white majority often does not acknowledge it.
- 1.2.3 Traditional patterns of community life have changed. Life for most people has become more complex and fragmented. More people have left the communities where they were born and brought up, often losing their links with the Church in the process. Once-accepted patterns of marriage and family life are far less common than they were. Very many people now own televisions and cars, and this has profoundly affected patterns of life, leisure, and churchgoing. More recently, the invention of the micro-chip has had far-reaching effects on manufacturing industry and on communication and information. These, and many other factors, have helped to create a much more secular society and culture, in which religion, seen as the private, individual affair of a minority, is increasingly marginalized. The secularization process can be seen, for example, in the growing number of requests for 'secular' funerals, and for serious 'non-religious' weddings.
- 1.2.4 There have been still deeper, less tangible changes taking place. Our understanding of ourselves as human beings, of human history, and of society has been deeply influenced by thinkers such as Darwin, Marx and Freud. Even people who have not heard of them, or who disagree with what

they know of their thought, have been affected by them. But whereas 'modern' thought has been characterized by a confidence in the capacity of human reason, Darwin, Marx and Freud, along with others, have fed a contemporary scepticism about our human capacity to know and understand; and for some 'post-modernists' the only reality of which we have knowledge is the reality of our own thought, culture and language. Alongside such influences as these there has been a marked rise in religious fundamentalism, in many ways a response to modern scepticism and the contemporary loss of faith in reason.

- 1.2.5 In the last fifty years, too, other parts of the world have become more accessible for many, with revolutionary advances in travel and communication. Personal contacts across national boundaries have increased. Decisions about economic policies are now often made at a supra-national level. Yet within nations, and even more between nations, economic power is unequally shared. The level of material comfort and affluence which millions in the West take for granted depends on a system which contributes to the impoverishment and hunger of many more millions, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Nor is injustice the only problem. The very future of the human family is threatened by the consumer society's reckless, even greedy plundering of the earth's resources, and the destruction of the natural environment of human life. The threat, too, of nuclear war, although it has receded, still remains, and does so in a situation of increasing international instability. Co-operation between countries proceeds slowly and uneasily, often against the background of strident nationalism which, in more and more countries, faces the challenge and opportunity of making room for a multi-racial society. Tolerance and understanding between adherents of different religious faiths are also urgently, and increasingly, needed. In the midst of all this tumult and change Christians, called to respond to the Creator's concern for the healing and unity of the world, must ask what the Church is, and what it is for.
- 1.2.6 There are further reasons why a new Statement on ecclesiology is needed. The ecumenical situation has changed: co-operation and dialogue between Churches of many different traditions have increased, and continue to do so, despite setbacks such as the failure of schemes for Anglican-Methodist unity. These closer relations with other Churches have provided new insights into the nature and purpose of the Church, and, at the same time, enabled each Church to see itself, its history, and its own distinctive features in clearer perspective. At a time when the Christian Church is increasingly experienced as a community embracing not only different traditions, but also different races and cultures, Christian self-understanding can hardly remain unchanged and static.
- 1.2.7 Biblical scholarship has also continued to develop during the last sixty years. In particular, it has helped to highlight the rich diversity of the New Testament, sharpening our awareness of the distinctive contribution of each writer. Wider theological study and reflection have also continued. Black

Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, and other perspectives have helped the prevailing theological traditions to be more self-critical, whilst at the same time contributing their own new insights and challenges.

- 1.2.8 This Statement assumes that what is said about the Church must be tested against Scripture. The *Deed of Union* (which sets out the purposes, doctrine, basis of membership and constitution of the Methodist Church) acknowledges ‘the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures’ to be ‘the supreme rule of faith and practice’. But each text, without exception, must be interpreted in the light of its context, and that is by no means a straightforward matter. There are differences of language, context and culture between the Biblical ‘world’ and our own, and our interpretation of the Bible in any case is shaped by tradition and by our experience, (both important resources to draw upon in a task such as this). In any case, the amount of relevant material in Scripture is too great to be quoted in one brief Statement. Texts cited in this Statement are usually examples representative of a wider number.
- 1.2.9 The relationship between Scripture and tradition must also be considered here. In the past, Protestant Christians have sometimes contrasted ‘tradition’ or ‘traditions’ unfavourably with Scripture. But whilst tradition may distort or be distorted, so also may our interpretation of Scripture. ‘Tradition’ (literally, ‘that which is handed on’³), means, above all, Christian faith, an experience, at once personal and corporate, a way of believing, praying, loving, sharing, which goes back to the beginnings of the Gospel. This means that Scripture and tradition are in dialogue: the tradition is the context which shapes our use of Scripture, and Scripture is the resource by which the tradition is deepened and purified. (On the subject of tradition, see also 2.4.7 and 3.1.16-17).
- 1.2.10 To recognize that Scripture used is always Scripture interpreted, and that our tradition, (and other factors) shape that interpretation, is to recognize that the question of authority is a complex, not a simple one. Three points may be made here. First, for the Christian the supreme authority is Christ, and to him there are vital, dependable witnesses, of which Scripture is the most important. Second, an eschatological perspective is vital: in this life we travel by faith, and faith is not the same as certainty, or it would not be faith. On such a journey absolute or infallible authorities are not immediately accessible. But, thirdly, our experience and discernment, nurtured, stimulated and corrected by the witness of Scripture and tradition help to confirm the truth that is in Christ. In such a way Christians may have ‘sufficient authority’⁴, or light, by which to travel.
- 1.3.1 The purpose of the Statement is fivefold. First, it is hoped that it will help the Methodist people, and perhaps others, to think more clearly about the nature and purpose of the Christian community, and to proceed from that to some constructive, if critical, self-examination about the structures, identity and purpose of the Church. In this way the Statement, drawing as it does on many recent dialogues and discussions both within Methodism and between

Methodism and other churches, may provide a useful reference-point at a time of rapid change.

- 1.3.2 Secondly, in view of recent, continuing and future ecumenical dialogues, the Statement might assist in promoting greater understanding between Methodists and Christians of other traditions. Thirdly, it is widely recognized that many people outside the Church find the Church more of a problem than Christianity, Christians less attractive (not surprisingly) than Christ. The Statement is intended to contribute towards the apologetic⁵ task of explaining the nature and purpose of the Church. The fourth aim of the Statement is equally practical: to encourage the Methodist people to deeper discipleship, as reflection about the Church properly carries with it a review of our personal commitment to Christ and to the Kingdom of God.
- 1.3.3 Finally, this Statement is offered as the reply of the Conference to a Memorial presented to Conference in 1991 and referred to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration in the context of the present Statement:

‘The Medway Towns (4/20) Circuit Meeting (Present 49. Vote 42 for, 1 against, 6 neutral) requests that a review be made of the Church’s policy and Standing Orders concerning membership (Reception into Full Membership), considering: 1. the importance of baptism as being ‘received into the congregation of Christ’s flock’; 2. the contemporary understanding of the term ‘membership’ and the searching questions posed by non-Methodist Christians participating in our acts of worship; 3. the bearing of office and voting rights; 4. the importance of ecumenical co-operation and emphases (e.g. inclusion of members of other Christian denominations without ‘transfer’; 5. the questionable use of membership as a basis for statistics, assessments, finance, etc.; 6. that sharing in the Lord’s Supper (with counts and averages if need be) and/or baptism (with certification) would be more appropriate possible criteria.’

(Section 4.4 below is particularly relevant to this Memorial).

- 1.4.1 There are three further sections in the main body of this Statement. Section II focusses on God’s mission and kingdom, and what they mean for our understanding of the Church. The Synoptic Gospels’ understanding of the Kingdom of God⁶, and the Trinitarian understanding of God, implicit in the New Testament and developed in subsequent tradition, show how the Church is a community both of worship and of mission. Its mission and its worship (which is shared by the Church in heaven), are the response to God’s undeserved, unstinting love in Christ. So God’s mission and kingdom are the primary ‘givens’, from which all derives and on which all depends. As agent of God’s mission, the Church is a sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom (2.1).
- 1.4.2 This primary understanding of the Church was anticipated in many ways in the life of Israel, to which the Hebrew Scriptures/Christian Old Testament

bear witness. According to this witness, the gracious initiative of God was the starting-point of Israel's pilgrimage, and it remains a vital link between contemporary Judaism and Christianity (2.2). In the New Testament, the understanding of the Church's life and mission which derived from Jesus is developed in a rich variety of ways. This diversity is itself an important testimony to the multi-faceted nature of the Church; it does not, however, obscure the fundamental underlying unity (2.3).

- 1.4.3 The Trinitarian foundation of the Church also determines what is meant by the traditional 'notes' of the Church: 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' (2.4). These are not simply ideal attributes of the Church, since they are rooted in the reality and life of God himself. But the Church is very far from being wholly open to God, and consequently sounds the 'notes' of the Church very faintly. Nevertheless, the God-centred character of the Church, however imperfectly realized, makes it possible to see more clearly its distinctive life of worship and prayer, the sacramental character of everyday life as the natural context of Christian faith and practice, and, thirdly, the Church's vocation of suffering and service.
- 1.4.4 Section III explores the insights and questions arising from the growing co-operation and dialogue of the Christian Churches. Not only has the ecumenical movement highlighted the diversity and differences of Christian traditions; it has also underscored the common faith which they share. Here the rich New Testament word *koinonia* is helpful: our sharing in, or communion with, the life of the Triune God is inseparable from our sharing with each other (3.1). There has also been a deepening common awareness that the Church is a pilgrim Church, a characteristic reflected in the incompleteness of every Christian tradition. The Church has been brought to birth, but has not yet attained its fulness. It comprises a pilgrim people seeking to enter, and to help others enter, the fulness of God's kingdom. Today, when many richly different cultures co-exist, and many Christians have more contact with people of other faiths, this is a task which calls for great sensitivity (3.2).
- 1.4.5 In the fourth section the Statement looks at Methodism. This explicitly Methodist section is the longest, and, as such, requires some explanation. The length has been determined, not by the importance of this subject compared with others, but by the extent and difficulty of the questions presented by the contemporary situation. Two particular questions present themselves:
- a. What distinctive or particular contribution, arising from its own history and experience, does the Methodist Church have to make to future ecumenical understandings of the Church?
 - b. Given the evolution of early Methodism from a connexion of 'societies' to a church, how are we to understand Church membership, and what should be the practical consequences which ensue from that understanding?

Notes:

- (1) Ecclesiology is usually defined as the theological study of the Church. On this see also 2.1.1.
- (2) Referred to in this Statement as NCC.
- (3) From the Latin *traditio* (cf. the Greek *paradosis*).
- (4) The concept of 'sufficient authority' is taken from R.E.Davies' *Religious Authority in an Age of Doubt* (Epworth 1968), pp.212ff.
- (5) 'Apologetic' in the sense of 'explaining' or 'defending', and deriving from the Greek *apologia* meaning 'defence'.
- (6) The expression 'the Kingdom of God', so central to the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, denotes, not so much an event or place, as God's sovereign being and action.

SECTION II: PERSPECTIVES FROM SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION**2.1 The Triune God: God's Reign and Mission**

- 2.1.1 If we are to answer fundamental questions about the Church, it is necessary to reflect first on God's relation to the world and his presence in it. This is implied by the many different ways of understanding the Church: for example, the new people of God, the body of Christ, a communion in the Holy Spirit, a sacrament or sign of Christ's continuing presence in the world. Behind such descriptions lies the conviction that the Church is a community called into being by God. Our starting-point, therefore, for understanding the Church is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2.1.2 According to the Bible, the mission of God to the world, that is God's outgoing, all-embracing love for his creation, began with the act of creation itself. In a 'fallen', divided world it was focussed on one nation whose ancestor was Abraham (Genesis 3; 11.1-9; 12.1-9). It continued through the many vicissitudes of Israel's history : storyteller, law-giver, prophet, men and women of wisdom – all were God's creative, often protesting agents in the story of the divine quest for a responsive people. Yet with Jesus this mission was focussed in a new and powerfully creative way. Jesus spoke to, and, literally, touched people no-one else could or would speak to and touch (Mark 1.41; 5.1-17). He visited their homes, even accepted their ministry (Luke 19.7; 7.44-46). Through his mission, sick people were made well, sinners were forgiven, and the prejudices of religious people exposed as never before.
- 2.1.3 Closely linked with the theme of God's mission is the theme of God's kingdom, the heart of Jesus' message. By 'Kingdom of God' the gospels mean the sovereign presence and activity of God, which already, before the coming of Jesus had been acknowledged as the ultimate reality from the beginning of time to its end (Psalm 145.13). But now Jesus not only

announced, but represented, even lived the Kingdom, in a way which was without precedent (Mark 1.15; Luke 7.22f; 11.20; 17.21). Already, in the here and now, the final salvation, that ultimate state of well-being intended by God for all humankind, was being experienced in many forms: in the restoration of health (Mark 5.34), in the quelling of the forces of chaos (Matthew 14.30-31), in forgiveness (Luke 7.47), in spiritual re-birth (Mark 10.15; John 3.8), in receiving the bread of God in the wilderness (Mark 6.35-44).

- 2.1.4 The mission of Jesus reached its climax in his journey to Jerusalem, and his consequent death by crucifixion outside that city. Historically speaking, both his message and mission were put in doubt by his death (Luke 24.21). For this reason, the testimony of the Church to the resurrection of Jesus lies at the very heart of its life and message. According to Christian faith, the resurrection vindicated Jesus – his life, his message, even his death. Indeed, because that death was now seen as the climax and fulfilment of his life, the cross became a powerful statement of the healing, forgiving love of God (John 13.1; 19.28; Romans 5.8; 1 Corinthians 1.18). In the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians saw both the completion of God's mission and the decisive evidence that God reigns – in and through the love which allowed itself to be crucified for the sake of the world.
- 2.1.5 It is not possible to pinpoint the exact moment when the Church came into being. For some, Jesus' calling of the twelve disciples and the particular charge to Peter, (which takes different forms in different gospels, Matthew 16.16-18; Luke 22.31-4; John 21.15-19) inaugurates, or at least anticipates the Church. For others, the Resurrection marks the beginning of the Church (John 20.21-3), or, if the Resurrection and Pentecost are distinguished, as in the writings of Luke, Pentecost may be said to be the 'birthday' of the Church. The precise historical details are not fundamentally important. What matters is the unanimous apostolic testimony that the Church owes its being to the grace of God in Christ.
- 2.1.6 So a new community was created which experienced already a foretaste of the divine life, intended by God for all humankind. Sometimes this life was described as 'salvation', sometimes, especially in John's gospel (3.15), as 'eternal' life, the life of God's 'new age'. But the effects of God's salvation transcended the lives of individual people. Barriers which separated groups and communities from one another were broken down (Galatians 3.28; Ephesians 2.14-16; Revelation 7.9). In still wider terms, the mystery of God in Christ could even be spoken of as freeing the created universe itself from its bondage to decay, ushering in a new heaven and a new earth (Romans 8.20-23). For God's purpose is nothing less than to reconcile the whole universe to himself through Christ (Ephesians 1.10; Colossians 1.20).
- 2.1.7 From the very first the Church understood its true life to be Christ-centred, and therefore God-centred. The Lord who is now at God's right hand is the Church's head; its members, joined in the fellowship of that Holy Spirit

which is the Spirit of God and of Christ, are 'in Christ'; its message is the Word of God, namely Christ himself. In all this the Church is a witness to divine grace. In the calling of disciples and the giving of the Holy Spirit, God committed himself to working with his people (2 Corinthians 1.5-7; 6.1). The first Christians knew that they were called to participate in God's mission and to proclaim God's reign as Jesus had done (Luke 10.9,11; John 20.20-23). The worship of God through, and because of, the risen Jesus, characterized and created such a mission (e.g. Luke 24.53; John 20.28; Acts 2.46). The Church's calling remains the same. But the presence of the Holy Spirit alone makes possible the credibility of the Church as a witness and sign in the world of new life in Christ. As in the ministry of Jesus, deeds and words belong together, inviting trust and hope in the God who has poured out his life for the life of the world. Thus the Spirit enables the Church to share in God's mission (1 Corinthians 12.3; 2 Corinthians 3.17).

- 2.1.8 The Church, therefore, derives its very existence and purpose from God's reign and mission, exemplified in and established by Jesus. But what character does this bestow on the Church? Here it is necessary to explore further the Christian understanding of God.
- 2.1.9 In later Trinitarian doctrine, (anticipated in the New Testament), Christians, in differing ways, have also found a model for the life of the Church. For example, to speak of God as a loving communion of three co-equal 'persons' suggests that the Church should be a community of mutual support and love in which there is no superiority or inferiority. Or, we may speak, as the Nicene Creed does, of the Holy Spirit 'proceeding' from the Father (and the Son)¹, indicating how the outgoing, all-embracing love of God for his creation flows through the Son and the Spirit. Such an understanding of the Trinity is authenticated when the Church shares in God's mission to the world. In whatever way we think of the Trinity, we cannot have an adequate ecclesiology without a proper Trinitarian doctrine, since the Church is called to mirror, at a finite level, the reality which God is in eternity.
- 2.1.10 A Christian way of living in anticipation of the coming reign of God remains difficult to sustain both for individuals and for the Church as an institution. This has been true from the beginning. The New Testament does not know of a perfect Christian community, and human sinfulness has not diminished with the passage of time. The life of the Church is continually eroded by it; its symptoms and results include fractured relationships, (both personal and communal), and discrimination on the grounds of sex, education, age and race. Seeking the true reign of God means facing the temptations which Jesus himself endured and triumphed over: the temptation to live for bread and not for the word of God; the temptation to test God, and require that God perform according to our wishes; to acquire power instead of to offer true worship. As the parables of the labourers in the vineyard and the prodigal son show

(Matthew 20.1-16; Luke 15.11-32), God's reign may offend our commonsense notions of how much should be given to whom, or who should come first. These, and other parables of the Kingdom shake us out of our self-deception that the reign and mission of God belong to the Church. Rather, the Church's vocation is to testify to God's reign and to share in his mission in our damaged, hurtful and often despairing society.

- 2.1.11 So the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus decisively established God's Kingdom and made possible the ultimate fulfilment of God's mission and purpose. But their full realization will come only at the end of time, and for that the Church must always be prepared (Matthew 25.1-13). Meanwhile, the Church, a pilgrim people journeying towards the End, must testify to, celebrate, and hope in the God who remains active in his creation, working out his purpose for its salvation (Isaiah 42.5; Colossians 1.15-16; Revelation 4.11).
- 2.1.12 In conclusion, God's reign and mission, focussed and expressed supremely in the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are the foundation of any authentically Christian understanding of the Church, and of the Church's participation in God's purpose for the world. In this task the Church is not an ideal community somehow separate from every local assembly of Christians. It was no accident that New Testament writers used the same word *ekklesia* both of the whole Church and, more often, of the local church. So each local church is, or may be, fully the Church. There is a close parallel to be drawn here between people and churches. A crowd is not more human than an individual simply because it is a crowd. This is true even when people and churches are imperfect. The Corinthian Church, for all its faults, was, for St. Paul, still 'the Church of God which is in Corinth' (1 Corinthians 1.2; 2 Corinthians 1.1).
- 2.1.13 But the parallel needs to be explored further. Human beings need each other. Indeed, we cannot really function or be human without each other. Similarly, although each local church contains within itself the fullness of the Church, its relationships with other churches are part of its lifeblood. (On this, see also 2.3.7 and 4.4). The practicalities of this will need to be considered in more detail. But there are other perspectives from Scripture and tradition to be explored first, beginning with the continuity of the Church with the people of God of the Old Testament.

Note:

- (1) The Nicene Creed, as finally agreed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, affirmed that the Holy Spirit 'proceeds from the Father'. The Western Church later added 'and the Son' – the so-called 'filioque' clause. The Eastern Church has never accepted this addition, objecting to the unilateral alteration of a creed originally agreed by representatives of the whole of Christendom. The British Methodist Conference of 1990 expressed a willingness, when there is sufficient ecumenical agreement to such a policy in the Western Church, to restore the Nicene Creed to the form agreed by east and west in 381.

2.2 The Covenant People

- 2.2.1 The writers of the books of the New Testament¹ saw the Church developing from the life and worship of the children of Israel. Christians share Israel's faith in the One God, the Creator of all, the Lord of history, the Judge who upholds the rights of the poor and downtrodden. The 'Scriptures' of the early Christians were the Scriptures of the Jewish people – what later generations of Christians have come to call 'the Old Testament'. The early Christians believed that some of the events in the life of Jesus had been foretold in them, and they used concepts from the Scriptures to express their understanding of him. They spoke of the Church as a 'chosen race' a 'kingdom of priests', the 'people of God' to express their own self-understanding (1 Peter 2.9-10; Revelation 1.6) – titles which had been used for Israel. Even the word *ekklesia* ('church') was used first in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures, as it is in Acts 7.38, to refer to the assembly of Israel in the wilderness. The word may have 'caught on' also because of its secular usage in the wider Greek-speaking world as 'a town assembly' (as in Acts 19.32).
- 2.2.2 One of the central ideas in the Jewish Scriptures is that of 'Covenant': God made a covenant with the people of Israel when he called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, revealing himself to them as the One God, and later rescued them from slavery in Egypt and gave them the Torah at Mount Sinai. ('Torah' is often translated 'law', but for the Jewish people it has a richer meaning, including also teaching, instruction). A covenant involves partnership and community. It is a legally binding commitment for a specific purpose: the giver of the covenant does so as an act of favour, an act of grace which calls for a responding commitment. Those accepting the covenant choose to do so, but the initiative is God's. In the Biblical understanding of covenant there is no suggestion that those with whom the covenant has been made are in any way better than others, nor that those who have not been chosen have been rejected. The covenant is made with some in order that all might ultimately benefit. The covenant God made with Abraham must be seen against the background of the covenant which the Jewish Scriptures said had been made earlier with Noah, and through Noah with every living creature on earth (Genesis 9.9-10). In being chosen for the Abrahamic covenant the Jews have no grounds for boasting. Such a privilege brings with it immense responsibilities. Obedience involves behaving in a way which reflects the character of God who gave the covenant – a loving response to what God has done. It involves both worshipping and serving God. (In Hebrew one word is used for both 'worship' and 'serve').
- 2.2.3 The Scriptures tell how over the centuries the children of Israel were often unfaithful. But God remained faithful and through the prophet Jeremiah said that he would institute a new covenant with them (Jeremiah 31.31-34). In speaking of a 'new covenant' Jeremiah did not mean that the old covenant was superseded. He saw the new covenant as an interiorization

of the Torah, not its replacement: 'I will set my Torah within them and write it on their hearts', (Jeremiah 31.33). The concept 'new covenant' is taken up in the New Testament and in the account of the institution of the Eucharist given by Paul and Luke the cup is said to be the new covenant sealed by Jesus' blood (1 Corinthians 11.23; Luke 22.20).

- 2.2.4 Jesus was critical of some of the teaching of the Jewish leaders of his day, but according to Matthew's gospel he came to fulfil the law and the prophets (Matthew 5.17). Paul, too, claimed continuity with Israel (Romans 3.31), arguing that his mission to the Gentiles, and its accompanying message of justification by faith, was foretold in Scripture. This meant the reconstitution of 'Israel', so that there was now discontinuity, as well as continuity, with the 'old' Israel. For example, Gentile Christians did not have to keep the whole of the law of Moses.
- 2.2.5 By the end of the New Testament period the majority of Christians were Gentiles, and in a number of places there had been fierce conflict between Christians and Jews. This conflict heavily influenced some of the New Testament accounts of the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It is reflected in much of the polemic against the Pharisees², and in what is said about 'the Jews', particularly in John and Acts. Recent scholarship, drawing on evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls and work done by Jewish scholars, has shown that Judaism in the time of Jesus was far more varied than is apparent from the gospels, and that Jesus' arguments with the Pharisees, as reported in the gospels, have parallels with arguments amongst the Pharisees themselves.
- 2.2.6 Some passages in the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 21.18-22; Hebrews 8.6-7, 13) suggest that when Jesus was rejected by some of the Jewish people of his day, Israel's election as the people of God and the covenant which God had made with Israel came to an end: the Church replaced Israel as God's covenant community. According to Hebrews 8, Jeremiah's words about a new covenant were fulfilled in Christ and in the community created by him. Other scholars, however have pointed to Romans 9-11, which states that, despite the rejection of Jesus by many of the Jews, God remains faithful to his promises and his covenant with the Jewish people still stands, and the Jews are still God's covenant people (Romans 9.4). The gifts of God and his calling are irrevocable (Romans 11.29). The tension between these two themes in the Biblical material still remains, and the Church must continue to seek a deeper understanding of the issues involved.
- 2.2.7 However the Biblical material is understood, the view that the Church has replaced the Jews as God's chosen people can never justify anti-Jewish feeling and the persecution of Jews by Christians. We have seen the tragic results of this in the Holocaust, and the failure of many churches to condemn anti-semitism. There is much of which the Church needs to repent.

- 2.2.8 For this reason any attempt to define the relationship of the Jewish people to the Church is a difficult, sensitive matter. Perhaps the very attempt is presumptuous. The Biblical witness to God's faithfulness to his people must not be ignored, and the Jews continue to be a dynamic, flourishing community, seeking to express their faithfulness to the Torah. But Jesus' own prophetic ministry to Israel cannot be set aside either. The new thing of which the New Testament speaks is not described as for Gentiles only. Rather, a new community has been established on non-racial lines, for in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Galatians 3.28).
- 2.2.9 The idea of covenant has had a special place in the thinking of the Methodist people since John Wesley first urged them to renew their covenant with God. In the light of the emphasis on grace and obedience in the understanding of covenant, the distinctive Methodist emphases, on God's grace and on holiness, commitment and social action, place Methodism firmly within the tradition of the covenant people.
- 2.2.10 The Church is called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all peoples, including the Jews. With all people this must be done in a spirit of dialogue, seeking to learn from the other's understanding and experience of God, as well as witnessing to what God has done in Jesus. In view, however, of the anti-semitism which has marred much of the Church's relationship with the Jewish people in the past, there must be particular sensitivity in dialogue with them, with a humble recognition of past mistakes, recognizing and celebrating the integrity and validity of Jewish life and worship, being willing to learn from them, and with a recognition of the special place of the Jewish people in God's eternal plan. At the same time Jews and Christians, both sharing the heritage of the Hebrew prophets, have a common responsibility to work together to combat all forms of oppression, discrimination and exploitation, and to establish justice and peace.

Notes:

- (1) It is almost impossible to avoid using the phrase 'the New Testament', but in doing so it is important to recognize that it can wrongly suggest that the Old Testament is now out of date and has been superseded by the New Testament. In fixing the Christian canon as the Old and New Testaments, however, the early Church recognized that the Jewish Scriptures are still essential for the Church's life, worship and theology.
- (2) Christian preaching has frequently failed to allow for this, portraying Pharisees as hidebound, legalistic reactionaries. They were not, and part of the challenge and 'offence' of the Gospel is lost when 'the Pharisees' are caricatured in this way.

2.3 New Testament Unity and Diversity

- 2.3.1 There is an extraordinary range of images of the Church in the New Testament. The Church is salt, light, a vineyard, a letter from Christ, the bride of Christ, the Way. The Church is called Israel, a chosen race, a holy nation, a priesthood, a remnant. The Church is the Body of Christ, a new

creation. Christians are variously called the elect, the justified, the poor, the slaves and friends of Christ, the children and sons of God. All of these images express part of the truth. But we begin this section with a picture of a local church in New Testament times.

- 2.3.2 The church at Corinth met, it seems, in the home of Gaius, (Romans 16.23). So it cannot have been large, even though Gaius was probably one of the better-off members, with a bigger house than most. Sub-groups, or cells, of Christians may also have met in other, smaller houses in the city (Romans 16.5). The enthusiasm and religious experience of the Corinthians were not in doubt. They enjoyed, perhaps to the point of indulgence, the gifts of the Spirit. They included in their number not only relatively poor people, but also the well-to-do and influential. Their social differences were sadly in evidence at their celebrations of the Lord's Supper. The identification of different groups within the church with particular apostles was clearly divisive. But of communities such as these Paul and other New Testament writers used remarkable language: they were the Body of Christ, the Temple of God, the household or family of God. What held them together? What was their mission, their way of life, their understanding of ministry?
- 2.3.3 In recent years Biblical scholarship has greatly enlarged our understanding of the early Christian communities, and especially so by its exploration of the rich diversity of the New Testament. Even in the gospels, where the word 'church' is rarely found, (only at Matthew 16.18 and 18.17), the living experience of the Christian communities out of which the gospels emerged has shaped the narratives, and much can be learned about the Church from them. It is very clear that there is no single model of the Church which can be labelled the Biblical model. Indeed, the New Testament's diversity implies that diversity – and a sometimes untidy, unharmonious diversity at that – is the norm. Nevertheless, the underlying unity of the New Testament should not be overlooked, since that, too, is vital. St. Paul's own passion for unity within and between churches finds expression at many points, (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12.4-31; Romans 15.25-27).
- 2.3.4 The unity of the New Testament witness about the Church has three aspects. First, its writers share the conviction that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the gift of the Spirit, determine the identity, constitute the message, and empower the mission of the Church. Second, the Church and Israel share a common historical, theological and spiritual heritage. Third, the life of faith which Christians share in the Spirit expresses itself in thankfulness, fellowship, love and hope, in worship to the glory of God, and in mission and service to the world. Thus, the New Testament offers confessional, historical, spiritual and ethical norms to help the Church discern when its essential life and witness are seriously threatened or compromised.
- 2.3.5 First, although the New Testament provides no full or detailed picture of early Christian worship (apart from Paul's brief discussions of the

problems at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14), there are enough hints and details as well as more general references to worship and praise to allow some important observations. The first Christians worshipped God through Jesus in the Spirit's power (e.g. Romans 8.15; 1 Corinthians 3.11,16); such worship was characterized by thanksgiving and praise (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 5.18; 1 Corinthians 11.24), by an awareness that their worship looked forward to, and even celebrated in advance, the ultimate fulfilment of God's purposes (e.g. Philippians 2.5-11; Ephesians 2.5-8), and, not least by a strong corporate identity which was, nevertheless, not exclusive (e.g. Acts 2.42-47; 1 Corinthians 4.24-25).

- 2.3.6 The unity of the New Testament precludes the view that 'anything goes', whether in belief or in practice. Conversely, the diversity of the New Testament precludes a narrow rigidity which attempts to impose a uniform pattern upon the Church. Examples of diversity are given below, indicating distinctive characteristics, rather than exhaustive summaries, of what different writers have to say about the Church.
- 2.3.7 Second, the mission of the Church is to live and proclaim God's kingdom and God's love as they were revealed in Jesus. But the New Testament offers a variety of perspectives on this fundamental task. The gospel of John speaks of the mission of the Father and the Son, and of the mission of the Church which flows from that (e.g. John 3.16; 20.21). Luke's gospel and Acts emphasize the place of the marginalized and the outcast in the Church: Jesus' acceptance of women, the lepers, Samaritans and others prefigures the mission to the (unclean) Gentiles in Acts. Paul's letter to the Galatians addressed the first great conflict arising out of the Gentile mission: should Gentile converts be required to be the same kind of Christian (i.e. Jewish) as their spiritual forbears? Paul insisted that they were 'justified by faith', not by becoming Jews. Here Scripture testifies to a vital distinction between evangelism (i.e. representing and proclaiming Jesus) and that kind of proselytizing which, in effect, means making Christians in our own image. Even the exclusive-sounding language of 1 Peter, ('You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood . . .')(2.9), is in fact applying an Old Testament description of Israel to Gentiles. The 'chosen race', therefore, potentially includes everyone.
- 2.3.8 Third, the New Testament gives a variety of insights into and models of the unity and interdependence of all churches. The 1937 Statement (p.15) describes this fellowship of the Spirit as 'the essence of the Church'. According to Acts, the first Christians in Jerusalem shared all their possessions, ensuring that none of their number was left in need. Paul, drawing on the analogy of the human body, teaches that all Christians are 'members' of Christ, and 'members' of each other (1 Corinthians 12.12; Romans 12.5). Thus each local church is, in a sense, a complete entity. But just as human beings function and flourish only in relationship with others, so also do churches. As in Acts, this interdependence found practical expression: Paul organized a 'collection' to relieve the poverty of

the Christians in Judaea, and, at the same time, to represent the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians (e.g. Romans 15.25-7). This unity, in the view of the writer of John's gospel, is modelled on and rooted in the unity of the Father and the Son (e.g. 17.21).

- 2.3.9 Some parts of Scripture, notably the gospel of John (e.g. 5.24), testify to what the Church already enjoys. But New Testament writers also reflect, in differing ways, that towards which the Church still moves. According to the letter to the Hebrews, this epoch is the time of the wandering, (with the risk of getting lost) (4.9-11), of the people of God. To have faith is to journey on; to loiter behind is to sin. Luke's writings similarly stress the need for endurance in the Christian life (e.g. Luke 8.15; Acts 14.22). Paul speaks about the Holy Spirit as the 'first instalment' of salvation (2 Corinthians 1.22; Romans 8.23), indicating that the work of salvation has been begun, but is not yet finished. So there emerges a picture of a Church, as yet incomplete, but moving forward to the great climax of God's creative purpose, when the Church itself will be perfected in the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4.13; 5.27), and when, mysteriously connected with this final perfecting, creation itself will be finally liberated from suffering (Romans 8.19-21).
- 2.3.10 But the pilgrim character of the Church did not mean that the churches of the New Testament were detached from their social and economic context, their eyes fixed firmly on the hereafter. In John's language, Christians, though not 'of the world' (meaning that the source of their real life comes from elsewhere), are still 'in the world'. Thus the letter to the Ephesians can combine the most exalted language about the Church with very down to earth, practical advice to Christians about their everyday lives (2.5-7; 5.21-6.9). 'The process of claiming for Christ every activity of the Christian . . . and redeeming every department of the corporate life of the world began in those New Testament days' (NCC p.16).
- 2.3.11 Being 'in the world, but not of the world' almost inevitably led to, and still leads to, conflict with the world, and therefore, suffering. (The word 'world' is used here with the meaning it normally carries in John's gospel: the world organizing its life apart from God). The synoptic gospels repeatedly stress that disciples must take up their cross. Mark especially, suggests that reluctance or failure to do so is the failure of the Church, which thus becomes the unwitting tool of Satan (Mark 8.33). The gospel of John recognizes the temptation of Christians to avoid suffering by remaining anonymous (e.g. John 12.41-2). But, in the words of a twentieth century Christian, 'A church which wishes to be invisible is no longer a church of disciples'¹.
- 2.3.12 Such suffering may involve social marginalization, as some of the language of 1 Peter implies. Sometimes, as in the situation addressed by the Book of Revelation, it will have a political dimension. Even in Acts, in some ways the most positive New Testament document towards the wider world, suffering is an inescapable part of the Church's vocation (Acts

14.22). Always, the Church as the Body of Christ will bear the marks of 'the dying of Jesus' (2 Corinthians 4.10), so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in that Body at the same time. Paul is describing his life as an apostle in 2 Corinthians 4.7-12, but his teaching elsewhere, especially his understanding of baptism as a dying with Christ (Romans 6.1-11), shows that his words apply to the whole Christian community. As there were wounds in the risen body of Christ, and Thomas recognized him by them, so suffering remains part of the Church's vocation, and a sign of its authenticity.

- 2.3.13 The varied testimony of Scripture to the Church's suffering belongs closely with its emphasis on joy, power and praise. For Matthew, it seems, the boat from which Jesus stills the storm has become a symbol of the Church, tossed about in the turbulence of the world, but possessing the peace of Christ (Matthew 8.23-27). The gospel of John predicts suffering and promises joy for disciples (John 16.33; 15.11). As for Paul, both his physical affliction (2 Corinthians 12.7b-10), and the deprivations and hardships he accepted for the sake of the gospel, (e.g. 1 Corinthians 2.1-5; 2 Corinthians 11.30) show that in his experience 'weakness' is the context in which the divine power is displayed.
- 2.3.14 As with other themes, different writers contribute different perspectives on the subject of ministry. According to Paul, ministry belongs to all, in that all receive a charisma of the Spirit, such gifts being richly varied, (Romans 12.4-7; 1 Corinthians 12.4-28). The churches reflected in Matthew's and John's gospels may not have had an organized ministry, although in Matthew the Twelve are clearly a special group: Matthew's church was probably a 'brotherhood' (e.g. 23.8), whilst according to John everyone is a disciple or brother, a friend of Jesus (e.g. 15.14). Spiritual authority 'resides in the Church as a whole, in so far as the Church is indwelt by the divine Spirit' (Matthew 16.19; 18.18; John 20.22-3). Even in those documents which refer to recognized leaders in the Church, leadership seems always to be exercised by a group of leaders, not by an individual. For example, 'presbyters', or elders, were the leaders of at least some local churches (Acts 14.23), a model of leadership deriving probably from the Jewish synagogue. The letter to the Hebrews, although emerging from a church with recognized leaders (13.7), argues, in effect, that a distinct order of priesthood within the people of the new covenant is no longer necessary. (On this point, see also 4.5.2. below).
- 2.3.15 In the writings of Luke, (his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles), the apostles were a unique, authoritative group as companions of the earthly Jesus and witnesses to the resurrection (Luke 22.28; Acts 3.15). (Paul and Barnabas are exceptions – Acts 14.4). In the letters of Paul the apostles seem to have been a wider group: it included, for example, Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16.7). (It is much more probable that the female name Junia, rather than the male name Junias, lies behind the particular form of the name in the Greek in this verse. If this is so, then the apostles were

clearly not an exclusively male group). In later writers the apostles are seen as the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2.20³; Revelation 21.14), as the first commissioned witnesses of faith and to faith.

- 2.3.16 A more structured ministry is beginning to emerge in the letters to Timothy and Titus, (widely, though not universally, thought to be written by a disciple of Paul attributing his work to the apostle). These three letters, the 'Pastoral' Epistles, more clearly than any other writings, except, perhaps, Acts, bear witness to the developing organization of the Church (e.g. 1 Timothy 3.1-13; 5.1-22). Their pattern of ministry appears to resemble the later 'three-fold ministry' of bishop, presbyter and deacon, but, as we have seen, it is far from being the only pattern of ministry according to the New Testament. And, at this stage, it cannot yet be called the three-fold ministry: Titus 1.5-7 shows that an 'overseer' is a 'presbyter', ('overseer' denoting the function, 'presbyter', or 'elder', denoting the office) (See also 4.5.5. below).
- 2.3.17 Beneath the diverse patterns of ministry in the New Testament, however, some fundamental themes may be discerned. 'The ministry of the whole people of God' can be discerned in the recurring insistence that each has a gift (Romans 12.3-5; Ephesians 4.7; 1 Peter 4.10). (On this, see also 4.5 below). The interdependence of all within the body of Christ issues in corporate forms of leadership (e.g. 1 Peter 5.1-2); even strong individual leaders such as Paul engaged in collaborative ministry (as the frequency of the word 'fellow-worker' in his letters shows, e.g. Romans 16.3,9,21).
- 2.3.18 This diversity of Scripture is particularly relevant for our ecumenical age, since we need to learn what our fellow-Christians of other traditions find in the Bible. What we find is inevitably influenced by our differing traditions. To adapt the words of an English Puritan writer, 'Tell me what you see in your Bible, and I will tell you to which Christian tradition you belong'. Ecumenical dialogue is thus important, since no denomination can do justice, in its faith, life and practice, to the diversity of the New Testament. For, in the end, the ecclesiology of the New Testament is not a mass of conflicting ecclesiologies, but a rich variety, and that very variety is the norm by which the life of the whole Church is to be directed, purified and enriched.
- 2.3.19 In this respect the Bible itself warns against a narrow Biblicism. Its varying pictures and models of the Church suggest that diversity, development, and new responses to changing situations and context are the norm. But in all situations, the underlying truth of the Church's nature and purpose remains the same: by its life and witness the Church points towards, by its sharing and worship it anticipates, and through its mission it is an instrument of the ultimate reality of the Kingdom of God, actualized in Jesus Christ.

Notes:

- (1) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in *Berufen, Beschenkt, Beauftrag* (3.1.1.), an Ecclesiology Report produced by the Evangelisch-Methodiste Kirche of Germany.
- (2) A Greek word used in the New Testament, closely related to the word *charis* ('grace'), and meaning a gift of the Spirit.
- (3) Some scholars regard the letter to the Ephesians as a letter written by a disciple of Paul, writing in Paul's name.

2.4 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic'

- 2.4.1 Since tradition is 'the vital companion of Scripture' (1.1.9), we cannot develop our understanding of the Church without regard for the long centuries which have elapsed between the New Testament era and our own. The Nicene Creed of the fourth century describes the Church as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. All four of these traditional 'notes' of the Church express a vital aspect of its life and identity, and so in this section we explore the meaning of each of them.
- 2.4.2 We begin with the first 'note' of the Church. The Church is one because God is one. This is not simply an aspiration, but a God-given reality¹. The Church, however, reflects the oneness of God most fully when its search for unity with God goes hand in hand with the search for and realization of unity within its own life. Indeed, one of the tests of the Church's unity with God is the unity which the Church enjoys within its own life. Conversely, because the basis of the Church's unity is God's own being and grace, that unity contains within itself a very rich diversity.
- 2.4.3 Second, the Church is holy because it belongs to God who is holy. Here, too, the Church is entirely dependent on God's gift of his Spirit. The 'holiness' of the Church has two dimensions. First, it denotes the Church's standing before God. Just as the expression 'the holy ones' in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 1.7) did not refer primarily to the character of Christians, but rather to their privileged, wholly undeserved membership of God's people, so the Church is holy simply because it belongs to God. This is why the praise of God is the Church's fundamental vocation and characteristic activity. But the word 'holy' would soon be a very hollow-sounding one if it did not also have a second dimension of meaning. The marks of holiness which the Church is called to show are those which can be seen in the life of Jesus, the holy one of God. So holiness is not an otherworldly characteristic; it is a Christlike one, deriving from the God whose very being was 'imprinted' on Jesus (Hebrews 1.3). In Methodist tradition, Christian holiness has been defined as 'perfect love', and such an understanding makes clear both the inner dynamic and the outward expression of the Church's life. Like unity, it is both gift and aspiration².
- 2.4.4 Third, the Church is catholic because there is one universal God, who has declared his love for all creation in Jesus Christ. So the Church embraces all nations and all peoples without regard to human distinctions of class or

tribe, colour or race, gender or sexuality, poverty or riches. Yet there is another sense in which we need to speak of the 'Catholic' Church. From earliest times the Church has sought answers to contentious questions by discovering the mind of the whole people of Christ. This was so in apostolic times; it was so in the long debate about which writings should make up the Christian Scriptures. A writing was accepted when, and only when, it found acceptance throughout the Church. By these means the catholic – i.e. authentic – faith of the Church was established and preserved. So the two meanings of 'catholic', 'universal' and 'authentic', are closely related. They are not, however, to be totally identified; the result, if they were, would be a monolithic, unchanging Church. First, it must be acknowledged that discovering, or achieving, a common mind amongst all the faithful (*consensus fidelium*) may, as in the formation of the New Testament canon, take a very long time. Second, such a consensus still need not preclude a remarkable diversity. (For example, Roman Catholics regard the Apocrypha as part of their canon of Scripture; Protestants do not). Third, it does not follow that the authentic faith cannot, or should not develop, even though 'progress', however defined, is neither unilinear nor inevitable. But it does seem that the Spirit of God seeks constantly to move the Church on. A new consensus on new questions, or even a new consensus on an old question, (notably the changed attitude to slavery), can emerge.

- 2.4.5 The Church is apostolic, insofar as it sustains a continuity with Jesus through his apostles and their successors, for God expressed himself through Jesus who sent out his apostles to preach and live the gospel message. The concept of 'apostolic succession' gives rise to many questions, and for this reason it will be useful to examine more closely the nature of the continuity both given to and required of the Church.
- 2.4.6 The continuity has several aspects: the continuity of the Church's loyalty to Christ, of its mission as agent of God's love and proclaimer of the Gospel, and of Christian experience in the fellowship of the Spirit. But such continuity is not dependent upon, nor guaranteed by an unbroken succession of ministers, whether presbyters or bishops, from the apostolic period. It is secured by faithfulness to Christ and his Gospel. As the 1937 Statement put it, 'the office is contingent on the Word, and not the Word on the office'. But continuity of ministry can be a valuable sign; the Methodist Church acknowledges this in its own practice, and in its response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, states that 'we await the occasion when it would be appropriate "to recover the sign of the episcopal succession"'.
- 2.4.7 More recently, there has been a growing ecumenical consensus about 'the apostolic tradition', reflected, for example, in the report so named from the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, (Fifth Series 1986-91), and in *Baptism, Eucharist and*

Ministry (BEM), the so-called Lima text, published by the World Council of Churches in 1982. Thus,

apostolic tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each. (BEM M34)³.

- 2.4.8 Debate continues between Churches about the characteristics which are essential to the Church⁴. Methodists 'recognize the centrality of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. They proclaim in word and sign the whole Gospel of creation and redemption'⁵. Both are powerful expressions of the Gospel of Christ. Both anticipate and celebrate in the life of an individual and of the Church God's purpose of salvation for all people. As such, they are neither private rites, nor social customs, but acts of worship and thanksgiving on behalf of and in solidarity with the whole world⁶. The Eucharist, in particular, focusses and expresses both the ongoing and the future life of the Church. As many liturgies, both ancient and modern, imply, it prefigures and images the life of the kingdom of God. Christian people, in all their diversity, come together regularly to meet around the Lord's table, celebrating in word and deed the risen presence of the Christ who gave his life, and sharing in a joint commitment to him in the world. In this typical act of Christian worship the Eucharist strengthens, and, in a sense, makes the Church. Tragically, there is division, notably between Catholics and Protestants, about the nature and extent of the community which can properly meet around the Lord's table. Thus a rite which powerfully expresses unity has become a source of disagreement. But ideally the Eucharist represents a high point in a dynamic life in Christ which itself is 'eucharistic' – that is, permeated throughout by thankfulness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2.4.9 Defining the Church and determining its boundaries are important, but difficult tasks. When is a body rightly called 'a Church'? Who belongs, and who does not? In the history of the Church many answers to these questions have been attempted. Some, notably in the Catholic tradition, have defined the Church and its boundaries with reference to a particular ministerial order: the Church is a body of people in communion with the Pope, or with the bishops. Many in the Reformation tradition have defined the Church as 'wherever we see the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution'⁷. Others, again, have considered the Church to be the community of the baptized. There are difficulties with all these views. Many Methodists will find the Reformation view attractive, provided it emphasizes, as it has not always done, that conduct, as well as belief, help to define the Church.

There still, however, remains the question: how is ‘the Word of God’ to be defined? There is something to be said for a specific, but less tightly drawn criterion: wherever people join together to respond to Christ as Lord – there is the Church. Methodists, it may be added, have generally been reluctant to unchurch any body of professedly Christian believers, even where they may lack certain elements – for example, the celebration of the two gospel sacraments – which Methodists consider normative for the Church⁸.

- 2.4.10 Visible boundaries are not unimportant. The Church is a visible, as well as a spiritual reality. As such, it needs to know, if not with total precision, who belongs and on what grounds. Moreover, commitment to the search for goodness and truth demands as much rigour as possible in formulating standards of belief and practice for the Church. But, however useful, or even necessary, it may be for a denomination to determine its own boundaries, it is a mistake to define too precisely the boundaries of the Church as a whole. In the last resort, only God knows who are members of the body of Christ, and so we need to retain a strong sense of the provisionality of humanly-drawn boundaries. Such a perspective may help the Church to be more sensitive both to the ways of God in the whole of his world, and to the way in which Christ seeks to lead his divided Church into the fulness of catholicity.
- 2.4.11 The Methodist Church’s self-understanding in this context is clearly set out in the *Deed of Union* to which reference was made in Section I. ‘The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation.’ (We return to the distinctive features and history of Methodism in Section IV.)
- 2.4.12 What, then, is to be said about the Church in the light of the traditional description ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’? First, these four ‘notes’ can be better understood if the familiar contrast between the Church and ‘the world’ is properly conceived. God’s purpose is the reconciliation and renewal of humankind, not solely or primarily the creation of the Church, although the vocation of the Church is to anticipate that renewal in its life and worship. The Church, then, is called to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic in and for the world, and at the same time over against the world. Second, the Church continually fails. Often, these characteristics are barely discernible in the Church’s life, and repentance is an ever-present requirement. But, third, the promises given to the Church should not be forgotten (Matthew 16.18, 18.20, 28.20). These Scriptural promises are the basis for what Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians call the ‘indefectibility’ of the Church. This concept, properly understood, is an expression of confidence not in the Church, but in the God who continually calls his Church to repentance, offering forgiveness and renewal. It finds expression in Charles Wesley’s lines:

‘Fortified by power divine,
The Church can never fail’.

Such belief in the ‘indefectibility’ of the Church does not mean believing that it already has that ‘perfection without spot and wrinkle’ (Ephesians 5.27), which belongs only to the end of time. It means believing in a God who perseveres in re-creation, and who provides the essential means of grace in word and sacrament.

- 2.4.13 These four traditional ‘notes’ of the Church find their fullest expression in the communion of all the saints, in heaven and on earth. This company ‘which no-one can number’ is united by its common thanksgiving to God. The saints on earth remain on pilgrimage, journeying towards and praying for an ever fuller expression of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The saints in heaven are their unseen friends, divided temporarily by death, but united in faith, love, thanksgiving and praise. For Christians in this life the four notes of the Church are both an invitation to thank and to trust God, and at the same time, a reminder that the Church is always in need of reform. In a word, unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are what God gives to, and requires of his Church.

Notes:

- (1) On this see also 3.1.1-2 below.
- (2) On this see also 4.3.6 and 4.3.7 below.
- (3) On ‘tradition’, see also 1.2.8 and 3.1.16-17.
- (4) 3.1.12 and 13.
- (5) Taken from the response of the Methodist Church of Great Britain and Ireland to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (*Churches Respond to BEM*, WCC 1986, Volume II, p.215).
- (6) On Baptism, see also 4.4.1.-3.
- (7) Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.9. Compare also Article XIX of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England.
- (8) On this see also 3.1.12.

SECTION III: ‘THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE’

3.1 Sharing In Unity

- 3.1.1 Throughout the twentieth century, most of the Churches in Britain, including now the Roman Catholic Church, have come slowly to a new appreciation of Christian unity. The prayer of Jesus that ‘all may be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you...’ (John 17.21) indicates that this unity is modelled on the unity of the Father and the Son. That means that it involves the closest possible communion, a unity of will, character, purpose, function, and love. It is unrealistic to imagine that a unity of this kind would not be expressed in a visible and structural union. The

Anglican-Methodist Union Scheme, for example, saw its final goal as one Church united for mission and service.

- 3.1.2 But we must begin from the premiss that the prayer of Jesus has been heard. So his prayer creates unity: Churches are already one in Christ, and their unity is the gift of God, not the end-product of human effort. Yet the responsibility remains of responding to the prayer of Jesus, since divisions – and denominations – are a visible denial of that fundamental unity. Divisions, or the rise of a new denomination, are not always sinful, but the Gospel means that they are not the norm, nor inevitable.
- 3.1.3 As we have seen (Section 2.3), the New Testament provides ample evidence that Christian unity included diversity. It was a natural consequence of its catholic mission to peoples of all races, languages and cultures. Indeed, one of the first great conflicts of the early churches centred on this very issue. Gentile Christians, it was eventually decided, did not have to observe the law of Moses, as most of their fellow Jewish Christians continued to do. Thus they would have worked on the sabbath, eaten pork, and so on. Diversity, with all its consequent tensions, (see, e.g. Romans 14.1-15.7) and unity were the pattern.
- 3.1.4 Many other factors have made for diversity. In any situation in which the Church finds itself, there will be powerful social, cultural, economic and psychological, or temperamental, forces at work. These factors partly, though not wholly, explain the rise of denominations, which usually originate out of a complex mixture of theological and non-theological factors. From this perspective, ‘denominations’ may be seen as an inevitable expression of human diversity. But need differences mean division? Should ‘denominations’ be separate entities within the Church, each with its own theology justifying its separation?
- 3.1.5 Many denominations have often begun with the aim of preserving, or recovering, an important aspect of Christian truth. Yet the ecumenical vision arises out of a growing awareness that in our separation we are incomplete. Indeed, ecumenism is increasingly providing a vision, purpose and unity which transcends denominations. In this process, more and more Christians are becoming aware of the riches which God has given to traditions other than their own.
- 3.1.6 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches from its inception has perceived the essential nature of the Church as *koinonia*. This New Testament word denotes both communion with the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1.9; 2 Corinthians 13.13), and fellowship with and ministry to each other (Acts 2.42; Romans 15.26). The 1927 Conference in Lausanne referred to ‘the communion of believers in Christ Jesus’. The Evanston Assembly of 1954 recognized that the fellowship of the Church is not simply human fellowship: ‘it is fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and fellowship with the saints, in the Church triumphant’.

3.1.7 A recent statement of the same WCC Commission¹ continues the same emphasis:

The divine gift of *koinonia* is both a gift and a calling. The dynamic activity of God drawing us into communion also entails the calling of Christians and Christian communities to manifest *koinonia* as a sign and foretaste of God's intention for humankind.

The statement goes on:

The dynamic process of *koinonia* involves the recognition of the complementarity of human beings. As individuals and as communities, we are confronted by the others in their otherness, e.g., theologically, ethnically, culturally. *Koinonia* requires respect for the other and a willingness to listen to the other and to seek to understand them.

3.1.8 *Koinonia*, then, denotes both what Christians share, and also that sharing is at the heart of Christian faith. Such *koinonia* involves a mutual sharing of spiritual and material resources, working together, and learning from one another. It is fundamental to the environment in which the Christian pilgrimage is undertaken. It implies togetherness, mutuality and reciprocity, requiring mutual recognition and a common acceptance of each other's identity. The contemporary Inter-Church Process in Great Britain, involving as it does a commitment to explore together the experience of fellowship on pilgrimage, reflects this Scriptural understanding of *koinonia*. Co-existence alone is not enough. *Koinonia*, and therefore ecumenism too, means a shared existence. And what is true of inter-Church relations is true also of the fellowship of each individual church: injustice and inequality based, for example, on race, gender or age have no place here.

3.1.9 *Koinonia*, then, is fundamentally an experience, belonging to the whole people of God, not an abstract concept deriving from remote schemes for Christian unity. As such, it is 'more important than any particular model of Church union that we are yet able to propose... For believers it involves both communion and community'².

3.1.10 The growing consensus amongst the Churches about *koinonia* is reflected particularly in the 1982 Lima Document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and in the Churches' responses to it. Different aspects of the Church tend to be emphasized by different traditions, and these need to be held together in balance. The Church is both the creation of the Word of God, and also the 'mystery' or 'sacrament' of God's love for the world. The Church is both the pilgrim people of God, and also the servant and prophetic sign of God's coming kingdom. All these aspects of the Church are complementary, and together provide an agenda for 'Churches together' to continue to explore.

- 3.1.11 Further work needs to be done on the question of the characteristics necessary for the unity of the Church. The statement on unity by the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1991) was called significantly, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*:

The unity of the Church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in: the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serving the whole of creation.

- 3.1.12 Some Christian bodies, such as the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army, do not celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Methodists have always been reluctant to unchurch other denominations, and for this reason, whilst affirming these sacraments as 'of divine appointment and of perpetual obligation' (*Deed of Union*), would probably wish to say that they are normative, and even essential for the whole Church, but not necessarily for every part of it. Such an agreement would make possible the co-existence within one Church of both sacramental and non-sacramental traditions. This would be an important instance of diversity within a commonly accepted Church order or structure. (The Methodist understanding of connexionalism may be able to contribute here – see Sections 4.6 and 4.7).
- 3.1.13 The reference in the Canberra Statement to 'serving the whole of creation' makes a point fundamental for the proper understanding of the 'ecumenical' movement. (The word 'ecumenical' derives from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning 'the whole inhabited world'). The drive towards the unity of the Church and the renewal of the world belong together. (On this see also 2.1, 2.4.8 and 2.4.9.). Love is fundamentally one, and the more closely Christians draw to each other in true *koinonia*, the more fully will they be drawn into mission and service in the world.
- 3.1.14 Because of this growing mutual understanding, co-operation between Churches continues to increase. For instance, the new ecumenical instruments were set up in 1990 in Great Britain and Ireland to enable and facilitate the Churches' work together in all areas of Church life, public affairs, international affairs, mission, racial justice, inter-faith relations and youth matters, as well as in 'traditional' ecumenical areas such as local ecumenism and unity in prayer. The work of the Joint Liturgical Group also continues; it has helped a growing number of Christians to feel increasingly at home in traditions other than their own.
- 3.1.15 Much work remains to be done on church structures. The Church, in common with other social organizations, has an organic structure to be administered, managed and maintained. Yet, if the Incarnation is taken seriously, theology has to be related to institutions, as well as to beliefs,

faith, relations and prayers. Thus the cooperation and greater understanding between churches, outlined in this section, cannot render organic union either unnecessary or undesirable. But there is a particular challenge here in the handling of inter-denominational tensions or conflicts, so that they become a creative force in the life of the Church, rather than an impediment to its unity. A beginning has been made in the establishment of ecumenical bodies in the British Isles for precisely this task³, even though authority rests finally with autonomous denominations.

- 3.1.16 Finally, despite widespread and growing agreement about the nature of apostolic tradition (2.4. above), differing understandings of tradition remain. All are agreed that no religious body could exist without some kind of tradition, yet Christians use the word itself in different ways. Some, particularly the Catholic and Orthodox, use the word 'Tradition' to mean the whole of Christian faith and practice. Others, including Methodists, have tended to refer to 'traditions' more critically, influenced perhaps by Scripture passages such as Mark 7, with its reference to 'human tradition'. Difficult questions undoubtedly remain, not least that of distinguishing tradition (in this positive sense) from distortions of it. Nevertheless, in the words of the Montreal Faith and Order Statement of 1963:

We exist as Christians by the Tradition of the gospel . . . testified in scripture, transmitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the word, in the administration of the sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christians by the lives of the members of the Church.

(On this subject, compare the quotation in 2.4.7). Thus, whilst the episcopal succession may be appreciated as 'a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church', 'it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in Churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate'. (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* M37-8)

- 3.1.17 Methodists can welcome the recent ecumenical emphasis on tradition as dynamic, rather than static, as a shared, 'lived experience', rather than simply a deposit of doctrine. In fact, far more than doctrine is passed on in this living tradition; sanctity and spirituality are also transmitted by all holy men and women throughout the ages, not simply or even primarily by Church leaders.
- 3.1.18 More recently, the member churches of Churches Together in England agreed to participate in 'Called to Be One', a five-year process to help the churches together to consider the meaning of Christian unity, and to discern the next steps to closer unity. At the same time the World Methodist Council/Anglican Consultative Council Report, *Sharing in the Apostolic*

Communion, invited both churches 'to test if there is sufficient agreement for our churches to engage themselves together more fully in faith, mission and sacramental life'. Even more recently, new sets of conversations began, involving the Methodist Church in England, Scotland and Wales with our ecumenical partners. Thus, at national and international levels, churches are being challenged to make a deeper commitment to one another in faith and life.

Notes:

- (1) *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness* (WCC Commission on Faith and Order, 1993), pp. 8-9.
- (2) *Towards A Statement on the Church*, a report of the Joint Commission Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, (1982-1986 Fourth Series), IV 23.
- (3) The Church Representatives' Meeting at Britain and Ireland level, its equivalents in Scotland, Wales and England, and ecumenical bodies at county or intermediate level provide for this.

3.2 The Whole Gospel for the Whole World

- 3.2.1 The unity of the Church and its mission are closely related, since the Triune God who commissions the Church is One, seeking to reconcile and to bring the world itself into a unity in Christ. In this mission, the Church's vocation is to be a sign, witness, foretaste and instrument of God's Kingdom. This involves both evangelism and social action, and, in our day especially, engaging with people of differing cultures and religious faiths.
- 3.2.2 To evangelize is to share with others the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. It is to make known by word and deed the love of the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people may find their lives renewed through faith in Christ as their Saviour, and give themselves in obedient service to him in the Church and the world. Evangelism in every context requires sensitivity as well as commitment. An authentically Christian evangelism reflects the nature of God. It will be vulnerable, patient, loving. Jesus himself and his apostle Paul are the outstanding examples in Scripture.
- 3.2.3 To make numerical growth the primary objective of evangelism is to distort the nature of the Christian mission. The growth of the Church is the normal, though not inevitable, byproduct of evangelistic work. The designation of the final decade of the twentieth century as a 'Decade of Evangelism' highlights the importance and urgency of the task.
- 3.2.4 The Gospel has to be both spoken and lived. The gospels show that 'good news and good works are inseparable'¹, and that to preach the Kingdom of God involves a commitment to justice and peace. So although Christians may differ in their respective commitments to evangelism and social justice, the two tasks belong together. The Church is called both to 'make

disciples' and to work for a loving, just and peaceful society which anticipates the Kingdom of God. This involves identifying with those who suffer, sharing their burdens, and speaking out with them against the injustice they experience. The precise nature of this task will vary as circumstances vary. Urgent contemporary tasks include according dignity, equality and justice to women as well as men, to people of all races, and to the many deprived of adequate food, drinking water, and homes. The growing threat to the natural environment presents another compelling task for a community concerned with and committed to the renewal of the earth.

- 3.2.5 The Church's commitment to justice need not, and must not mean conforming to the culture or society in which it is set. The Church's agenda, including its social and political concerns, derives ultimately, not from the world, but from the loving, disturbing, peace-making God revealed in Jesus. Sometimes, as history shows, the contemporary concerns of society at large have reminded the Church of facets of the Kingdom which it has neglected. But the Church's response in all these things must be determined by its fundamental obedience to God.
- 3.2.6 This solidarity with God, who creates and redeems, governs all the ethical thinking of the Church. The opening stories of the Bible make two fundamental affirmations about creation: first, it is the work of God, and is therefore good, and, second, wilful human beings have marred that creation. In a world which is both essentially good and 'fallen', the Church's vocation is clear: to reflect the life and image of the creating, redeeming God, to anticipate in its worship and life the vision of God's kingdom, to reverence and show compassionate love for human beings created in the divine image, and to care for God's creation. In this task the Church will need both the moral courage of the prophet and the gentleness of Christ.
- 3.2.7 The Church will live and speak the Gospel, therefore, only if it remains a worshipping, praying community. The goal of all Christian life, and the primary purpose of the Church, is oneness with God. Such a goal is both a personal and a corporate one. Individual Christians pray, worship and suffer because they belong to a community whose hallmarks include praying, worshipping and suffering. The quality of the Christian's and the Church's life depends upon the extent to which they share God's life, and their witness will make it easier, or, tragically, harder for others to believe in the God of whom they speak. Worship and prayers are shallow, even idolatrous, if they do not, however gradually, imprint the character of God on the lives of those who worship and pray. 'The Church of Christ proclaims Christ even more by what it is than by what it says.'²
- 3.2.8 Two particular opportunities today call for special mention here. The relationship between the Christian faith and the many, richly-varied cultures of the world calls for careful work and sensitive co-operation. The gospel has to be expressed within each culture in a way appropriate to that culture; Christians all over the world are rightly developing an

interpretation of the Gospel and patterns of Church life appropriate to their culture. For most, if not all, that will mean re-discovering the Gospel within each culture, since 'all language, even that in Scripture and creed, is inculturated'³. This process of exploration is an especially sensitive one when a culture is a religious one. Nevertheless, all cultures, even so-called Christian ones, need to be transformed in the spirit of the Gospel.

- 3.2.9 There is another area of concern. Countless people other than Christians have a deep concern for spiritual matters. Some, professing no religion, hunger for a different life-style. Aware of an emptiness which material possessions cannot satisfy, they protest against the aimlessness of much of modern life, and the increasing devastation of the planet. Others, also outside the churches, try to link prayer and politics, reflection and action. Many more are adherents of world religions other than Christianity, and no consideration of ecclesiology can be adequate which does not consider the Church's relationship with them.
- 3.2.10 Christians from the beginning have encountered people of other faiths, and wrestled with the theological questions raised by those encounters. But during the last fifty years people of other faiths have come to live in Britain in far greater numbers than before. Conversely, more people than in the past from Europe and North America have had the opportunity to visit countries in which people of other faiths are in the majority. Consequently, many Christians have come to recognize in these people a deep appreciation of the importance of the spiritual life, and an awareness both of God's presence and of their relationship with God. Those who have engaged in dialogue with them have often found that their understanding of God and his purposes, and of the Christian faith, has been deepened and enriched.
- 3.2.11 The Church's understanding of the significance of other faiths cannot be determined by appealing to individual texts in the Bible. Some (e.g. John 14.6) sound exclusive; others (e.g. Acts 10.34-5) sound inclusive. All without exception must be interpreted in the light of their historical and literary context. The Bible as a whole bears witness to the one triune God whose covenant with Noah, preceding his covenant with Israel, was a covenant with all creation. The glory of this Creator God fills the whole earth. According to the New Testament, the world was created through the Logos, the eternal Son of God incarnate in Jesus (e.g. John 1.3,10; Hebrews 1.2). This has close links with what the Old Testament says about the Wisdom of God (e.g. Proverbs 8.22). So it is not surprising that Biblical writers, whilst acknowledging a widespread ignorance of God, also recognize a widespread knowledge of God (e.g. Romans 1.19-20; Acts 17.26-28). Christians, therefore, may gladly affirm of other faiths that 'where there is truth and wisdom in their teachings, and love and holiness in their living, this, like any wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, love and holiness that is found among us is the gift of the Holy Spirit'⁴.

3.2.12 The Church's task is to participate in God's mission. That involves dialogue – not only sharing the Christian faith, but listening to the understanding which others have of God, life and salvation. It involves working with them for justice and peace. Such co-operation and dialogue are fruitful only if they are entered into in a spirit of openness, for 'authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other'⁵. In this way, Christians can come to a deeper understanding of God, the Christian faith, and of what it means to be the Church, and at the same time contribute to God's eternal purpose of bringing all things into a unity in Christ.

3.2.13 In this new situation, Christians have many kinds of opportunities for contact with people of other faiths. Neighbours or friends who may share a common concern, colleagues who may be engaged in a joint project, members of a conference on multi-faith issues may be drawn to pray together. Christians may have the opportunity to visit a mosque, a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara during an act of worship, or people of another faith may be invited to a Christian service. Civic or national multi-faith services may take place in which prayers, hymns, and readings from different faiths are used. It is particularly important that those sharing in such acts of worship do not feel they are compromising their own beliefs. For such prayer and worship to be authentic it must be entered into for its own sake and not as a means to an end. But it can be a way of enabling people of different faiths to come to a deeper understanding of one another. Guidelines prepared by the British Council of Churches, *Can We Pray Together?*, recognize the difficulties, but state that:

When participants in an inter-faith service know and trust one another and are acquainted with their respective religious convictions, and when such a venture is an optional extra to the regular diet of worship which each enjoys in his or her own religious community, then the experience has an authenticity of its very own, and participants ought to be allowed to express themselves enthusiastically about its effect.⁶

3.2.14 Methodists have often been in the forefront of those exploring closer relationships between different denominations and people of different faiths. This probably owes much to John and Charles Wesley's emphasis that God is lovingly at work amongst all people, and that Christ died for all. It may also be partly due to the influence of John Wesley's call for a 'catholic spirit':

Although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.⁷

- 3.2.15 In his sermon on the Catholic spirit, Wesley spoke only of Christians being drawn together in this way. His strong belief in original sin and the total depravity of human beings led him, in general, to speak of people of other faiths as 'utter strangers to true religion'. But at the same time, when faced with individual examples of faith, he could come to a different conclusion. He said that some of his Jewish parishioners 'seem nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who call Him Lord'⁸ and in a sermon on faith he asserted that a Muslim writing, *The Life of Hai Ebn Yokdan*, 'contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled'⁹. In the light of these strands within Methodist tradition, it is natural that many Methodists today should be concerned to explore opportunities for fellowship with people of other faiths, both to learn from them about their experience of God and to share with them what God has revealed in Christ.
- 3.2.16 Christians of all traditions are at the beginning of a long period of growing dialogue with people of other faiths. To refuse opportunities for such dialogue would be a denial of both tolerance and Christian love. To predict, at this point in time, the outcome of such dialogue would be presumptuous or faithless; Christians may enter such dialogues in the faith that God will give them deeper insight into the truth of Christ. People of other faiths can hardly be said to belong to the Church. But the Church has to be understood in a way which does not deny the signs of God in their midst.

Notes:

- (1) The Manila manifesto of 1989.
- (2) NCC p.20.
- (3) WCC Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order (Santiago de Compostela 1993), *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*, (Faith and Order Paper no.164, WCC 1993), p.18.
- (4) *Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations*, (a document prepared by the Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC), p.2.
- (5) *Religious Plurality*, p.4.
- (6) *Can We Pray Together?*, (BCC 1983), p.6.
- (7) *The Forty Four Sermons*, (Epworth 1944), pp.443-4.
- (8) John Wesley's *Journal*, Monday, April 4th, 1737.
- (9) *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 3, Sermons III, 71-114, (Abingdon Press 1986), pp.494-5.

SECTION IV: THE METHODIST EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH – DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Methodist Church has always understood itself to be part of the whole Church of Christ. This conviction is the starting-point for this section of the present Statement. It follows, therefore, that the preceding sections are integrally related with this one. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are the context in which the Methodist Church must continue to live out its calling in the world, and to offer its distinctive contribution to the wider Church. It does so with the theological framework provided by Scripture and tradition, and in the knowledge that it is a pilgrim Church, travelling with many others of different traditions, but united in the one faith. It is within this wider framework and ecumenical spirit that Methodism's distinctive experience and contribution are explored here.

4.2 From Society to Church

4.2.1 'John Wesley regarded the movement which he led as raised up by God to "spread Scriptural Holiness throughout the land"' (NCC, p.37). His urgent mission to preach God's love and to call people to a new life of holiness created a 'connexion' of 'societies' within the Church. Such religious societies were a common devotional device of that time – not a substitute for the parish church, but a supplement, providing a disciplined framework for religious devotion. 'Society', in fact, became the universal term for a local group of Methodists. A 'connexion' (and Wesley's was to be the largest of several in the eighteenth century) united such societies under a common banner of doctrine and discipline. The travelling preachers were also said to be 'in connexion with Mr Wesley', and this was probably the origin of the wider use of the word 'connexion'. Wesley was criticized, however, for not seeking episcopal supervision for his new organization. The problem, not uncommon in Christian history, was that of integrating a movement within an already existing structure. In the end, Wesley tried to hold together convictions which proved irreconcilable. He was deeply committed to the Church of England, but was prepared to be innovative and adaptable in his mission, impelled as it was by an 'Arminianism of the heart', the passionate conviction that the Gospel was for all. So, although he intended that the Societies which he had organized should be closely linked with the Church of England, they were never an integral part of it.

4.2.2 Wesley's call to personal faith and to holiness reflected a concern for justice and integrity in everyday life, and also an optimism about what the grace of God could accomplish in human lives. Members of the societies were committed to a common discipline of Christian life, gave each other support, and acted as a task force for the Church in witness and social action. They resembled a religious order, with their annual Conference acting like a 'chapter' for the itinerant 'order of preachers'. Like the friars

of St. Francis in an earlier age, Wesley's movement found ways to 'fill the gaps' at a time when the old parish system was failing to keep up with rapid population growth in Britain's new industrial areas.

- 4.2.3 The exclusion of Wesley from many Church of England pulpits and the refusal of Holy Communion to Methodists in the parish churches because they were 'not of this parish' alienated some Methodists. Wesley's ordination in 1784 of two men as deacons and presbyters, and his 'setting apart' or 'ordination' (Wesley's word) of Thomas Coke, already a priest in the Church of England, as Superintendent of the American Methodists made a final break much more likely. (Wesley also appointed Francis Asbury, with Coke, as Joint Superintendent in America, Coke later ordaining Asbury as deacon, elder and Superintendent.) Charles Wesley was sure that 'ordination was separation', though it was rather more complex than that. Some Methodists were never members of the Church of England; others had little love for the established Church. Wesley himself claimed that the emphases of Methodist societies were entirely consonant with the Scriptures, the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Thirty Nine Articles, and the *Homilies*. But the style of the Wesleyan movement, and the religious culture to which it gave rise, made integration within the Hanoverian Church difficult.
- 4.2.4 Over the years, Methodism changed from a connexion of United Societies into a denomination or Church. The movement's self-understanding altered as it grew into an independent organization with its own identity and structures. Societies were sub-divided into 'classes'. Preaching meetings, love-feasts, Watchnight and Covenant services nurtured their members. For these, separate Methodist buildings were erected and, though most Methodists did not wish to be thought of as 'Dissenters', the buildings were registered under the Toleration Act to prevent mob violence. Officers such as stewards and class leaders were appointed to manage the societies' affairs. Lay people were permitted to preach as 'extraordinary messengers' though Wesley always took the view that they had no right to preside at Holy Communion. The Conference, having begun as informal 'conversation upon the work of God', was given legal continuity by the Deed of Declaration of 1784, establishing the 'Legal Hundred' which became the corporate *episcopate* after Wesley's death. Wesley ordained ministers for America in 1784, for Scotland in 1785 and, under pressure from the Societies, for England in 1788.
- 4.2.5 So the process of separation of Methodism from the Church of England was gradual and untidy. It was a reality for some of Wesley's followers before he acknowledged it himself. For example, despite his warnings, Methodist preachers were sometimes referred to as ministers, and societies as 'churches'. Or again, in spite of Wesley's promptings, some Methodists, whether for cultural or theological reasons, were reluctant to receive communion in their parish church. (Sometimes the issue was what they perceived to be the 'impurity' of the parish priest). For them society

meetings were more than a mere supplement to the local church. Thus by the time of Wesley's death in 1791, Methodism was virtually an independent denomination, (though some wished it not to be so). The breach was constitutionally, if not practically, complete after the 'Plan of Pacification' in 1795, when the itinerant preachers were allowed to preside at the Lord's Supper if majority opinion in a local society so wished. (Rites of passage, however, were, even then, normally at the parish church until the Marriage Act of 1836). The Methodist New Connexion (1797), the Primitive Methodists (1811), and the Bible Christians (1815) always considered themselves Dissenters from the Church of England. By the time the other groups who later made up the United Methodist Church broke away from Wesleyanism, the break with the established Church was complete.

- 4.2.6 The change from society to denomination can be traced in various ways. First, the ministry changed from an extraordinary mission of travelling preachers to a settled pastorate, providing the connexion with a uniform style of ministry. At first, itinerants were said to be 'ordained in essence' by their 'reception into full connexion' (a phrase still used today). This reception was said to be virtual ordination. However, ordination by the laying-on of hands was introduced, first, for those going overseas, and very occasionally for others, and then in Britain by the Wesleyans in 1836. Extensive debates about the ministry continued in the nineteenth century. In the process the laity claimed and eventually gained a larger share in church government, notably in the admission of laypeople to the Wesleyan Conference in 1878.
- 4.2.7 The evolution from society to denomination could also be seen in the development of the understanding of membership. The first members of Methodist societies were admitted for their 'desire to be saved from the wrath to come'. Admission was not by a statement of faith as in the 'gathered churches' of orthodox dissent, but by entry on a 'class book' and acceptance of the rules of the society. At this stage, exclusion from the society was certainly not tantamount to excommunication. But as a society grows and new generations are recruited to it, its membership tends to be understood more as membership of 'a church'. Thus in 1837, the Wesleyan Conference urged parents to have their children baptized into 'the Church'; in 1846 it recommended 'catechumen classes', and by 1878 Junior Society classes were to be created for the training of new members. An order for the 'Recognition of New Members' was added to the Book of Offices in 1894, (though the term 'Confirmation' was not used until 1962). In spite of this development, Wesleyanism did not officially use the title 'church' until 1897, although its schools – at one time 912 of them – were said to be connected to Wesleyan Methodism as a branch of 'the visible Church of Christ'. (The instruction to these schools to use both the Wesleyan hymnbook, a societary concept, and the Catechism, a church symbol, demonstrates the ambiguity latent in Methodist origins).

- 4.2.8 Primitive Methodism is an almost perfect example of the development of a 'society' or 'conversionist sect' into a denomination. From its beginnings in small groups in the Potteries in 1811, a growing church consciousness can be seen in the late Victorian period. The title 'church' rather than 'connexion' appeared on class tickets in 1902, and denominational headquarters were built in London in 1912. But the ethos of the Primitive Methodists was different, combining as it did a simple, almost Quakerly style with a deep concern for social justice derived from the struggle for workers' rights in mining and agricultural labour. The various groups which formed the United Methodist Church of 1907 can be shown to have experienced similar developments. Of these, some, such as the Bible Christians, had originated in revival movements, others in disputes over church order and church government. They often represented a 'local' rather than a 'connexional' style, and disliked heartily any apparent centralized Conference or clerical domination.
- 4.2.9 The origins of Methodism have left their mark. Indeed, some of the distinctive characteristics of the Methodist Church derive from its societary origins. Methodist hymnody, the preaching service, the use of Wesley's *Forty-Four Sermons* and *Notes on the New Testament* as a 'subordinate standard' of belief, the distinctive liturgy of the Covenant service, and the importance of 'membership', with the annual or quarterly issue of a ticket of membership to each member (which early in the Wesleyan tradition authorized admission to Holy Communion) – all point to the 'societary' past. An especially valuable part of this earlier societary tradition is the role of the laity in worship and church government: this belongs to the fulness of the Church.
- 4.2.10 The past, however, can trap a church in denominationalism and make it a prisoner of its own cultural identity. A 'society' can be a group dominated by its boundaries, rather than an open community, or an effective pressure group in a wider society. Methodist history has revealed those perils. The use of familiar terminology, familiar hymns and familiar forms of worship can nurture a cosy sectarianism. On the other hand vital theological emphases could be lost to the wider Church if Methodism were to allow Charles Wesley's hymns to disappear. Again, when membership is the basis for financial assessment, the judgement that a member has 'ceased to be a member' can be driven by financial rather than pastoral concerns (4.4.9-10).
- 4.2.11 During the nineteenth century, the intense style of personal discipline, inherited from Wesley and illustrated in his rules for members and preachers, was combined with the pietistic evangelicalism of that period. The result was a tendency to highlight individual moral issues, such as drinking and gambling, rather than the complexities of poverty, urban deprivation, unemployment, homelessness and imperialism. Of course, it would have been foolish to neglect matters of individual conduct which also concerned people's well-being and happiness. The self-educated, self-

controlled, self-possessed men and women who were moulded by Methodism could produce social betterment both for themselves and for others through the early trade unions, Friendly Societies, Sunday Schools and Liberalism, especially in local government. But this life-style could also produce a self-righteousness with little sympathy for the 'undeserving poor'.

- 4.2.12 The flexibility which enabled Methodism to become a powerful evangelical tool tended to become stereotyped. Some apparent cooling down may be inevitable when a movement begins to be more settled, developing its own patterns and traditions. For example, the ordained ministry of Methodism evolved from an 'extraordinary mission' of full-time, lay itinerant evangelists. The itinerant system, designed for evangelism, and to enable men of rather limited abilities not to overreach themselves and 'burn out', helped to weave a close-knit connexion, giving British Methodism a powerful sense of 'family'. But too much power in the hands of the rather immature itinerants was one cause of the splits which led to the formation of the United Methodist Free Churches.
- 4.2.13 In many ways, the heart of the matter was the class meeting. Here, too, the powerful, intimate relationships between recent converts subsided, and the meetings themselves became formalized. Newer members did not always find them helpful, and the early spiritual power and effectiveness diminished. In the place of the class meeting the institutional Church developed, although the class system was revived in a modern form in the University and College Methodist Societies ('Methsocs') before and after the Second World War.
- 4.2.14 Great discernment is needed in order to distinguish between those features of Methodist history and tradition which should be cherished and handed on to the wider Church, and those which need to be abandoned, or adapted, because they no longer contribute creatively to contemporary Christian life. In such a task, it is helpful to look nearer the core, and not just at the trappings of 'tradition'. The commitments and styles that flow from Methodism's beginnings as a society offer insights into ways of being the Church which challenge us for the future. We can offer these insights as part of Methodism's distinctive contribution to the wider Church, whilst, at the same time, acknowledging our own incompleteness and the danger of being hide-bound by our heritage. Fellowship was the spiritual cement of early Methodism, bonding and building both the local societies and relations within the connexion. The quest for holiness was not solitary but drew people together closely in a discipleship which embraced devotion, discipline and social action. A pragmatism and a flexibility which developed structures to facilitate mission characterized church growth. The significance of these themes for Methodism today, in an ecumenical context, will be explored in the sections which follow.

4.3 Worship and the Spiritual Life in Methodism

- 4.3.1 If Methodist ecclesiology is to be fully understood, it is important to explore the distinctive features of its spiritual life and worship. These, together with its history, the understanding of church membership and of ministry which derive from that history, and its distinctive structures¹, are especially revealing of what Methodism is about.
- 4.3.2 From the earliest days, Methodists have sung their faith. This celebratory, even lyrical, character of Methodist worship is rooted in the experience of the unmerited, unstinting grace of God. Worship 'begins with God's offering of himself to us'. It is 'first the celebration of God's love to us, not the presentation of our offering to him'². Worship is then, and only then, about the offering and transformation of ourselves. Thus worship has a twofold intention: first, adoration and praise, and, second, our transformation by the grace and power of God³. Worship, then, is prior to mission, yet mission is the natural, even inevitable consequence of worship.
- 4.3.3 This understanding of worship is, of course, not unique to Methodism. But Methodist origins and history have given its worship a distinctive character. This stems partly from the fact that the early Methodist societies existed within and alongside the Church of England, their own freer forms of worship and more intimate fellowship supplementing the liturgy of the local parish church. In the long run this gave Methodist worship a 'both-and' quality: formal and informal elements were combined, both fellowship and evangelism were emphasized, and services were led by laypeople, often more frequently than by ministers. Similarly, Methodists value the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (as it has traditionally been called in Methodism). Through this Sacrament Methodists experience the real presence of Christ. John Wesley declared it to be not only a confirming but a converting ordinance. At the same time Methodists also set great store by preaching, which can challenge, confirm and convert. Worship at its best has reflected Methodism's understanding of the Church as a gathering of believers, or would-be believers, called to holiness in response both to the apostolic tradition and their own fresh, developing Christian experience.
- 4.3.4 The word 'experience' is important in the Methodist tradition (1.2.9). Two words or themes, prominent in the hymns of Wesley, illustrate this emphasis. The first is the sense of wonder at the undeserved grace of God, as in the opening line of the Wesleys' conversion hymn of 1738, 'Where shall my wondering soul begin...?', a note sounded in other well-known hymns such as 'Love Divine, all loves excelling'. Second, the frequency of the word 'prove' (normally used, in its common eighteenth century sense, to mean 'test') is noteworthy. The believer proves (tests) in her or his own experience the truth of the Gospel, the dependability of God's promises, and so on. This theme is especially prominent in hymns about holiness: for example,

O that I now from sin released,
Thy word may to the utmost prove . . .

4.3.5 Other distinctive characteristics of Methodist life and teaching also derive from Methodist origins. The setting up of small Christian cells, or societies, within the larger Church⁴ was marked by an emphasis on fellowship, discipline, and a rootedness of Christian living in daily life. These tightly-knit ‘class meetings’, as they were called, so typical of eighteenth and much nineteenth century Methodism, are now rare. (Their decline began in the last century; a Wesleyan Conference report of 1889 made a significant admission in declaring that ministers were not to insist that failures to attend one’s class meeting warranted loss of membership.) Many factors, spiritual, theological and sociological, have contributed to their widespread, though by no means complete, demise. There can be little doubt that the Church is the poorer for it.

4.3.6 Charles Wesley’s hymns remain the best guide to the Methodist understanding of the Christian life. First, it is a shared experience, a vital part of which is the mutual support of the small group:

Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other’s cross to bear,
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel his brother’s care.

Second, Christian experience and daily life belong inextricably together. Life ‘in the Spirit’ has to be lived out at work, in the home, and whatever circumstances Christian disciples find themselves in.

This finds expression in the hymn,

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only thee, resolved to know,
In all I think, or speak, or do.

Third, although less demonstrable from hymns, the Methodist emphasis on discipline should not be overlooked. In reading and hearing the Word of God, in attendance at the sacraments of the church, in private and corporate prayer, Methodists share disciplines practised by most other Christians. But in their structured class-meetings Methodist discipline was distinctive.

4.3.7 Such an emphasis on close fellowship can become less than Christian. The Church is a mission⁵, as well as a fellowship, and many Methodist groups and churches must plead guilty over the years to becoming ‘closed shops’. Methodism’s understanding of its particular mission, however, has always been closely connected with its concern for holiness. As the *Deed of Union* puts it, the Methodist Church has cherished the belief that ‘in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread Scriptural Holiness throughout the land...’

4.3.8 Wesley's own understanding of holiness was formed by earlier Christian writers and saints, as well as by his close observation of the early Methodists. It was, therefore, rooted in catholic tradition and contemporary experience. But his teaching on holiness was criticized and perhaps misunderstood both in his lifetime and subsequently. Wesley emphasized that holiness was not an 'absolute perfection', which permitted no further growth in grace or which made a person immune to error. The holiness which he believed was attainable in this life was far deeper than the absence of 'wilful transgressions of a known law' (his definition of actual sin). Rather, perfection meant perfect love, including freedom not just from evil actions, but evil thoughts and 'tempers'. Wesley has been criticized for ambiguity: in fact, he taught holiness both as the ultimate goal of Christian living, and also as an experience possible now. (The frequency of the word 'now' in Charles Wesley's hymns of Christian experience is very striking, as in the line 'O that I now from sin released...'). The two strands of Wesley's teaching gave rise to two later traditions in Methodism, the one emphasizing growth in holiness, the other instant holiness. Wesley also taught that people could know that they had been perfected. This, too, has been criticized, and not without justification, although Wesley was careful to stress that people could fall away from the state of holiness.

4.3.9 The emphasis on holiness is not unique to Methodism. The Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions, for example, share it. It is also present in the Black-led Churches. But the Wesleyan emphasis on holiness as perfect love gave Methodist spirituality its own distinctive character, and, at the same time, a proper ecclesiological context. First, holiness was never understood as an individualistic affair: in Wesley's own words, 'the gospel of Christ knows no religion but social: no holiness but social holiness'. The societal and connexional character of early Methodism helped to prevent the idea that any Christian could be 'an island entire unto itself', an emphasis to be re-affirmed in a society where there is a strong tendency to regard religion as a private, purely 'spiritual' affair⁶. And since love is the real test of holiness, such holiness finds its natural milieu in, and not apart from, Christian fellowship. Second, (and here the influence of Methodist origins can be seen) holiness is an experience given to, rather than achieved by ordinary Christians, not a select few set apart from the rough and tumble of daily life.

4.3.10 Two quotations from John Wesley may serve to conclude, and to summarize, this brief discussion of Methodist teaching on holiness. The first comes from his *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* (1753). Writing of the Christian, Wesley writes:

Above all, remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbour: of universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship,

or to those who are allied to him by blood or recommended by nearness of place. Neither does he love those only that love him, or that are endeared to him by intimacy of acquaintance. But his love resembles that of him whose mercy is over all his works’.

In his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley writes in similar vein:

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this: the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for any thing but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, have you received this or that blessing? If you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart; that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.

There is nothing here with which members of any Christian tradition would wish to disagree. But Wesley’s words in many ways express the heart of Methodist ecclesiology.

Notes:

- (1) The Methodist understanding of Church membership and of ministry within the Church are discussed in sections 4.4 and 4.5 respectively. Sections 4.6 and 4.7 deal with Methodist structures.
- (2) Worship Commission Report to Conference, 1988, p.8.
- (3) Worship Commission Report, pp.22-3.
- (4) See section 4.2.1.
- (5) See sections 2.1 and 2.3.6.
- (6) See section 1.1.4. On this, see also 4.4.

4.4 The Relationship of the Individual to the Church Community in Methodism

- 4.4.1 Baptism and confirmation are discussed at this point in the Statement, not because the Methodist Church differs radically from other Churches on these matters, but because there are particular questions for Methodism stemming from its origins as a connexion of societies. It will be seen, in fact, that the Methodist Church shares many convictions common to other Churches¹.
- 4.4.2 The New Testament conveys a powerful sense that the first century Christians belonged together and gladly recognized as much. Their belonging stemmed not just from a voluntary agreement, nor merely the

need for mutual support, but from the mutual obligation arising out of the nature of the community to which they belonged. Christian believing and living are essentially societal in nature. This is true both for individuals and local church communities.

- 4.4.3 It follows that the individual's response to God of belief in Christ for salvation means being incorporated into Christ and his people. Baptism, which, like the Lord's Supper, the Methodist Church recognizes as 'of divine appointment and perpetual obligation' (*Deed of Union*), is the sign of this. In a mission situation such as the earliest period of the Church, believers' baptism will be normative, but the practice of baptizing the children of believers probably began in New Testament times precisely because belonging to the Christian community was so fundamental. So infant baptism is no less incorporation into the Body of Christ. By it the Christian community recognizes the primacy of God's grace, seen in the community, and continued through the Christian's development in childhood, the time of her or his own active response in Christian commitment, and the remainder of the Christian pilgrimage. This primacy of grace is true whether or not a person chooses actively to take up her or his place in the body of believers; God's offer of grace is not conditional on human response. The initiative is from God, and the Church's rites of Christian initiation are both its embodiment and the Church's response.
- 4.4.4 In infant baptism, the response of faith is expressed by the church community, which looks forward to and prays for that response in the infant. This practice recognizes that all that baptism signifies need not be present in the ritual moment. It is, after all, a rite of initiation. In infant baptism the norm will be the baptism of the children of Christian parents. But in a post-Christian age in which many families' hold on the Christian faith and experience of Christian worship come through the occasional offices of baptism, marriage and the funeral service, the pastoral practice of this understanding of infant baptism is not easy.
- 4.4.5 But individual Christian decision remains important. Confirmation is a milestone in a Christian's pilgrimage, an act of public worship in which we declare our repentance and commitment to Christ, profess the faith into which we were baptized, are received with a prayer of invocation for the gift of the Holy Spirit, welcomed as committed Church members, and share with the whole church present in an act of dedication. It was only in the last years of the nineteenth century that this was formalized within Methodism in an act of worship. Hitherto, all the varied strands of Methodism operated a formal procedure whereby people became members in their absence by the decision of the Leaders' Meeting, (in some respects the precursor of the Church Council). The emphasis now falls, as in other traditions, on an act of worship as the occasion of the reception of a committed member of the Methodist Church. But an important trait of Methodism's societal past is retained in the insistence that those to be received as members are those 'approved by the Church Council' (*Deed of*

Union). Another societal tradition continues in the entering of new members' names in a class book. This places them under the care of a pastoral visitor or class leader, who is usually a layperson.

- 4.4.6 It would thus appear that the Methodist Church makes no practical distinction between confirmation, seen as a milestone of personal faith, and becoming a committed Church member, which emphasizes the corporate nature of what is done. This is not entirely so. The use of the word 'membership' in this context derives from Methodism's origins, and means, in effect, 'committed' membership, (there is no intention to deny the reality of membership conferred by infant baptism). This is why, in the Methodist tradition, people have been removed from membership, (and may subsequently be re-admitted to membership), without this being understood to mean that somehow their baptism or confirmation was being repudiated, and would at some future date have to be repeated².
- 4.4.7 Confirmation is often the time when a new member, especially if younger in years, becomes a communicant. But practice varies a great deal, as in other traditions, and in Methodism particularly so. Three groups of people, though not confirmed members of the Methodist Church, are especially welcome at the Lord's Table. First, the 1987 Conference encouraged the practice of children receiving communion, even before confirmation, subject to certain conditions (notably, instruction and the support of a worshipping community). Second, 'communicant members of other Churches whose discipline so permits'³ are welcomed. Third, because the Lord's Supper is regarded both as a confirming and a converting ordinance, the Methodist Church welcomes others to communion who wish thus to express their real or dawning faith in Christ, even though they are not members; if they do so regularly, it will be the minister's responsibility to invite them to consider becoming members. The welcome at the Lord's Table and 'reception into membership' together indicate how the individual's commitment to Christ is surrounded by, and relates to, that of the whole Church – first the local 'society', but essentially linked through Circuit, District and Conference into a web of inter-dependence in which gifts, decisions and responsibilities are shared. Indeed, membership is understood to be of the whole Church, and is transferable on removal.
- 4.4.8 In practice, a regular worshipper at a Methodist church may not be a confirmed member of the local church. This has often happened in the past as well, but in the Methodist understanding this is something of an anomaly. An individual's commitment to Christ can truly be realized only in full participation in the worship, witness and service of the Christian community, and this is normally best achieved through the local church and the web of its relationships with others. Thus it is normally only members who are eligible to hold office in the local church. (If this seems an unnecessary requirement of someone, now worshipping in a Methodist congregation, who is a confirmed member of another Christian church, it should be emphasized that a commitment to the Methodist Church need not

involve repudiating one's standing within, or even commitment to, another Christian tradition.) The logic of this understanding of membership can be seen in the way in which a member of one local church may hold office in another, if there are practical reasons for it. This illustrates the Methodist conviction that belonging to Christ in his Church is much more than a local matter.

- 4.4.9 The names of those who are not members, but nevertheless attend, should be recorded on the community roll in the hope that the link may develop, when appropriate, into membership. Thus a regular attender at Methodist worship who is not yet a member may be invited to consider confirmation, or, if unbaptized, baptism. In this way the period of sharing in the life of the Church as an 'adherent' is understood to be one in which a person is gradually finding her or his way into full membership of the Church. After a period of training in Christian faith and living (historically known as the catechumenate), such a person is able, after the approval of the Church Council, to take the step of confirmation, and so be able to play a full part in the life, work, witness and decision-making of the Church at all levels.
- 4.4.10 Sometimes members do not take up fully the privileges and responsibilities of membership. Some are able to do so only as far as their health or circumstances allow, (although they may still minister in various ways, not least by their prayers). In such cases the strong sense of mutual belonging should mean that the local church community maintains contact and offers pastoral care. Others may begin to attend a church of another tradition, and their membership may be transferred to their new denomination. Others will simply lapse. They may not have ceased to believe, but for some reason they have stopped attending their local Methodist church. There may be good reason for this, but even if that appears not to be so, local pastoral care needs to be properly informed, understanding and sympathetic. After visiting by their class leader and minister, 'the name of any such person who by such prolonged absence severs himself or herself from Christian fellowship shall be removed from the class book by the Pastoral Committee and he or she shall thereupon cease to be a member of the Methodist Church' (Clause 10, *Deed of Union*). In this way the Church recognizes that these members no longer stand where they once did. The community roll, however, provides a way for the local church to remain in contact: 'the name of a person who has ceased to be a member . . . shall be retained on the community roll unless he or she requests that this shall not be so.' (S.O. 054). The removal of their names from the list of church members is a way of stating that membership, by definition, involves commitment (however faltering or imperfect); what it cannot do is to determine whether such people continue to be part of the body of Christ, or to question the validity of their baptism, which, by its very nature, cannot be repeated. In such a way Methodist discipline indicates that Church membership calls for our continuing obedience, and that the Church must take proper care of its people, and keep count of its resources if it is to worship, witness and work effectively.

- 4.4.11 This procedure has caused much heart-searching and heartache. The Pastoral Committee's motive for removing someone's name from the membership roll may not in practice always be purely pastoral, as it should be. They may be oppressed by financial considerations, aware that their local church's contribution to Circuit finances may be related to its quoted membership total (although churches are increasingly finding better and fairer ways of assessing financial contributions than solely by reference to membership figures). But despite doubts and occasional misuse of the practice of removing the names of lapsed members from the membership roll, this discipline is an important testimony to the belief that a non-practising Christian is a contradiction in terms.
- 4.4.12 In recent years, the ecumenical movement, a more mobile population, and a readiness to worship in the local church, even when that church is not of one's own denomination, have all helped to make Christians more familiar with the practice of traditions other than their own. Christians who come to Methodism from other churches often find the close care of its members, (as described in 4.4.8-9), both attractive and questionable. It is attractive because it can be pastorally very effective when, for example, people move home or students leave home for college. But it is more questionable when it leads Methodists to exaggerate the importance of membership figures, especially in estimating a church's strength. The practice of recording members as having 'ceased to meet' can also be easily misunderstood, particularly by those who do not fully understand Methodism's societal origin and background, or who find it hard to appreciate the value of it for our life together in the Church today.
- 4.4.13 Amongst Methodists at large an important debate continues. Some hold that the evolution from a society to a denomination was and is both desirable and inevitable, since now a 'societal' approach to Christianity dangerously over-simplifies what being a Christian is, especially in areas of social responsibility. Others believe that the New Testament churches were 'societies', and that an emphasis on discipline and accountability is a healthy corrective to nominal Christianity. What can hardly be denied is that the Methodist movement of the eighteenth century enabled the Methodist Church to discover that a denomination must have a web of primary groups – a society of friends – at its heart, and that to allow that to dissipate would be a dangerous mistake, and an immeasurable loss to the Church as a whole.

Notes:

- (1) See also 2.4.8.
- (2) On this subject see 4.4.9-10.
- (3) *The Methodist Service Book*, p. B1.

4.5 The Priesthood of All Believers and Ministry

- 4.5.1 The *Deed of Union* declares that ‘the Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class...’. In this section we explore both the theological and historical background to this corporate priesthood of the whole people of God, and its practical implications for the life of the Methodist Church today.
- 4.5.2 First, it is necessary to recall some of the points made earlier in this Statement about the teaching of the New Testament on ministry¹. (The early Christian communities had no separated and distinctive priesthood. Christ alone was High Priest, the mediator between God and humankind (Hebrews 9.1-2). The whole Church was ‘priestly’, continuing the ministry of Israel and her Messiah (1 Peter 2.9), but no one was ever called a priest in the sense of offering a cultic sacrifice. The old cultic language was transferred to the community and to daily life: a local church could be called ‘the temple of God’ (1 Corinthians 3.16), and the self-offering of Christians to God was their ‘sacrifice’ (Romans 12.1-2). This kind of ‘priesthood’, therefore, was not about who should preside at the Lord’s Supper, (about which the New Testament is silent), but focussed instead on the living of sacrificial lives.
- 4.5.3 It will be seen that the New Testament directs us to the priesthood of the body of believers, rather than the priesthood of every believer. This latter emphasis is not necessarily wrong, but it is much more individual-centred than the language of Scripture, which stresses the inter-dependence of believers. Nevertheless, in the churches to which Paul wrote, each person had a Spirit-endowed gift². This did not mean that everyone could do everyone else’s task, but that everyone had both a gift and a task. Thus ministry was charismatic and functional.
- 4.5.4 In the light of this strong Scriptural testimony, Methodism continues strongly to affirm the ministry of the whole people of God. (The Greek word *laos*, from which ‘lay’ and ‘laity’ are derived, is used in the New Testament to refer to the whole Church as God’s people (Titus 2.14; 1 Peter 2.9-10). It hardly ever denotes ‘laypeople’ as distinct from ‘leaders’ or ‘presbyters’³. ‘The ministry of the people of God in the world is both the primary and the normative ministry of the Church’, for the Church is as much itself ‘in the world’ as it is ‘in church’⁴. This ministry in the wider world, outside explicitly ecclesiastical contexts, and away from church premises, is expressed in Christ-like living, in social action and in witness to the Christian Gospel. But the ministry of all Christians within the corporate life of the Church is also important. By their various gifts the members of Christ’s Body contribute to the health and growth of the Church. Indeed, the ministry of laypeople has been essential to the very functioning of Methodism from its earliest days. Far more Methodist services of worship are led by local preachers than by ordained ministers. The partnership of ordained and lay ministers remains vital to the work and

well-being of the Church⁵, even though this truth has often been lost sight of in the history of the Church.

- 4.5.5 After the time of St. Paul, leadership of churches by ‘overseers’ (*episcopoi*) or ‘elders’ (*presbyteroi*) seems to have become more common (2.3.14). Before long, as a matter of order, the presbyters began to preside at the Eucharist, as partners of the ‘overseer’ (or ‘bishop’) who probably emerged from their ranks. Final proof is difficult to sustain, but evidence from the late first century and early second century writings (Clement, Ignatius, the Didache, Justin Martyr) suggests such a development. The description of a presbyter as a ‘priest’ (*hierous*, a quite different word) came later, and is certainly found in the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian. Gradually the division into ‘lay people’ and ‘clergy’ became wider.
- 4.5.6 For the Reformers, all are priestly by baptism, all have the same standing before God, but not all have the same office. Office is given, first, by God’s call and then by the commission of the whole community. The Protestant reformers rejected the priestly style of presbyteral ministry. The presbyter, instead, is the representative minister of the Word. Even on the ‘left wing’ of the Reformation a pastor had normally to be called and commissioned before leading a service of Holy Communion. Wesley clearly espoused the general Reformed view in an Anglican form, which continued, with modifications, into the Wesleyan tradition of Methodism. The ‘itinerant preachers’ of early Methodism were an evangelical order with a unique mission to spread ‘Scriptural holiness’. Mission was seen as prior to church order, although Wesley saw the need for ordination before anyone might preside at Holy Communion – hence his ordinations for America, Scotland and England. After Wesley’s death the ‘itinerant preachers’ began to baptize, preside at communion, conduct burials etc., and evolved clearly and quickly into regular ministry. The call of a Wesleyan minister was tested at various levels of the Church before training, a period of ‘probationary’ ministry and, finally, ‘reception into full connexion’ and ordination at Conference. After 1836 laying-on of hands at ordination became the norm, in the Wesleyan, though not in most of the non-Wesleyan Methodist Churches.
- 4.5.7 Ordination at Conference distinguished the ordination of Methodist ministers from that of dissenting ministers⁶. This, and the distinct, yet complementary ‘reception into full connexion’ were features retained from Methodism’s origins as a ‘connexion’ of societies, and indicate that a minister is ordained to the whole Church, and not to a ‘title’ or ‘pastoral call’.
- 4.5.8 In other Methodist groups the distinction between the ‘itinerant preacher’ (who was paid and full-time) and the ‘local preacher’ was less clear-cut than in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. When needed, local preachers could preside at Holy Communion under the direction of the Superintendent Minister. Today when lay persons or deacons preside at the Lord’s Table, through pastoral deprivation or missionary emergency,

they do so with the full authority of the Conference, though they may only preside in the Circuits where they serve. This authorization is important, indicating that the Eucharist is not a private, or even simply a local matter, but a celebration of the whole Church. So it is appropriate that it should be celebrated under the authority of those who are representative of the whole Church. This authorization is thus an expression of connexionalism, and, also, as a response to a pressing local need, an expression of the Methodist view that Gospel imperatives determine church order.

4.5.9 The question of who may preside at Holy Communion is, of course, ecumenically important. Here the response of the Methodist Church in Britain to the ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*⁷ is relevant:

. . . we acknowledge the need of the Church for persons who are called and set apart for leadership in pastoral care, preaching and intercessory prayer, and for presidency at the sacraments. Given this, the debate about the use of the word 'priest' is really a very subtle one. It turns upon the question whether the ordained minister contributes to the eucharist in his/her own person some essential element other than the right to preside at it. If the eucharist is the offering of the people presided over by the ordained minister, then the word 'priest' is not appropriate. If the eucharist is the offering of the people presided over by the ordained minister and specifically activated by the minister's presence, the word 'priest' is appropriate.

4.5.10 The earlier part of that quotation echoes the *Deed of Union*. The statement quoted earlier (4.5.1) continues: '. . . but in the exercise of the Church's corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required, and thus the principle of representative selection is recognized'. In the 1974 Report on *Ordination*, this understanding of the ordained ministry was set firmly within the call of the whole people of God to be the Body of Christ in the world:

. . . as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world.

4.5.11 Ordination thus does not confer any special priestly powers on the minister, who is neither more nor less a priest (as defined in 4.5.1.) than any other Christian. But ordination implies the total commitment of a life-long vocation, and is therefore rightly thought of as unrepeatable. The authority of a minister belongs to the office, which consists in enabling the Church's

whole ministry in such a way that Christ is effectively present in preaching, in the sacraments, in the Church's discipline and pastoral care.

- 4.5.12 It will be seen that the ordination of ministers to the whole Church, their appointment to Circuits rather than to a specific pastorate, and, thirdly, their stationing by Conference – all reflect the continuing connexional character of Methodism. In these respects the Methodist ministry resembles a 'religious order'; the pastoral sessions of Conference and District synods foster the same ethos. Finally, Methodism's connexionalism and corporate understanding of ministry and of *episcopate* can be seen in the way in which ministers are 'made':

Making a man or woman a minister is performed by the Methodist Conference, by standing vote in the reception into full connexion, and through its appointed representatives in the ordination service: it is not performed by individuals, or a group of individuals, acting in their own capacity'⁸

- 4.5.13 Patterns of ministry in the Methodist Church, as in other Churches, continue to change, and rightly so. The 'presbyteral' ministry now includes those who are itinerant and those who are in local appointments. Following the decisions of the 1998 Conference, full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order are in full connexion as deacons. This growing variety is to be welcomed as healthy and Scriptural. But it will be both these things only if it enables and expresses, rather than detracts from, the ministry and priesthood of the whole Church. It will be important, too, to retain the connexional character of Methodist ministries, not for narrow, denominational reasons, but because connexionalism, by whatever name, is an authentic expression of the interdependence which is such a vital feature of the life of the whole people of God.
- 4.5.14 Finally, but of fundamental importance, the Methodist Church unhesitatingly affirms its conviction that both the presbyteral and diaconal ministries are open to men and women. Some of Wesley's preachers were women who were semi-itinerant, although he did not consider them (or the men for that matter), to be presbyters. In Primitive Methodism and among the Bible Christians women were admitted as itinerants. But although the principle of the admission of women to the presbyterate was accepted in 1939, their acceptance was unfortunately postponed in 1948, and not until 1974 were women ordained as presbyters. Similarly in 1990, when the Methodist Diaconal Order celebrated a hundred years of service, Conference received both men and women into full membership of the Order for the first time. The ordination service was also held at Conference for the first time; previously, the President presided at an ordination service at Convocation. Methodism, therefore, fully endorses the equality of women and men in ministry, whilst recognizing that the distinctive contribution of women's ministry to the wholeness of the Church has yet to be fully explored and realized.

Notes:

- (1) See 2.3.13-15.
- (2) See 2.3.12.
- (3) Acts 6.12 is a rare exception.
- (4) *The Ministry of the People of God in the World* (Methodist Conference Agenda, pp.539,540, 1990).
- (5) 4.7.3.
- (6) That is, ministers of nonconformist churches, such as Baptist and Congregationalist ministers. Methodism has often tended to see itself as a 'half-way house' between the Established Church and these 'dissenting' traditions.
- (7) See 3.1.10.
- (8) *Ministry, Baptism and Membership in the Methodist Church* 1962, p.15.

4.6 The Connexional Principle

- 4.6.1 The connexional principle, as we have seen, has been intrinsic to Methodism since its origins. Although this principle has not always come to expression in a complete or balanced way in Methodist structures and practice, it enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the Church. It witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God himself. Whether the word 'connexion' is retained or not, the principle is fundamental.
- 4.6.2 How is this 'connexional principle' effected? First, at all levels of the Church, the structures of fellowship, consultation, government and oversight express the interdependence of all churches, and help to point up, at all levels, necessary priorities in mission and service. Second, alongside this, as the natural corollary of connexionalism, local churches, Circuits and Districts exercise the greatest possible degree of autonomy. This is necessary if they are to express their own cultural identity and to respond to local calls of mission and service in an appropriate way. But their dependence on the larger whole is also necessary for their own continuing vitality and well-being. Such local autonomy may also need to be limited from time to time in the light of the needs of the whole Church.
- 4.6.3 If we ask how this complementarity of connexionalism and local autonomy are to be justified theologically, the answer lies in the way in which the New Testament speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, (Ephesians 4.12 referring to the whole Church, 1 Corinthians 12.12-27 to the local church). Every organ or limb has its own distinctive function, but belongs to a living whole. Similarly, neither individual Christians nor individual churches function effectively in isolation, but are dependent on a larger whole. And what is true of individual Christians and churches is true also of regional and national Churches. The Church of Christ is an interdependent whole, because ultimately there is 'one Lord, one faith, one

baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4.5-6).

- 4.6.4 The connexional principle, as we have already observed, was integral to Methodism from its beginning. Wesley's preachers were itinerant; that is, they were available to be sent wherever they were most needed. The stationing of presbyteral ministers today by Conference is an acknowledgement that the ministry as a whole is at the disposal of the entire connexion, and not just a part of it. More generally, the Methodist sense of 'belonging', at its best, derives from a consciousness that all Christians are related at all levels of the Church to each other. Thus the unbroken link of Christians serving overseas with those at home was expressed in lines such as 'Inseparably joined in heart, the friends of Jesus are'. Many others of Wesley's hymns testify to this deep sense of mutual interdependence.
- 4.6.5 The essence of connexionalism is implied in the practice of the apostolic Church. From the earliest days the apostles travelled, and with other Christians conferred regularly on matters of common concern in mission. Both the needs and the virtues of particular churches were commended to others, and examples held up for imitation. Sectarianism was condemned because it destroyed *koinonia*, and individual churches were reminded of the foundation in Christ of their local *koinonia* within the universal: 'All things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's' (1 Corinthians 3.23). Such teaching points to the privilege and duty of each local church to adhere to, to draw from and to contribute to the riches of life in Christ.
- 4.6.6 The Methodist understanding of authority and Church government derive from the character of Methodism as a 'connexional' Church. The interdependence which properly lies at the heart of connexionalism naturally precludes both independency and autocracy as modes of church government. Insofar as such interdependence involves submission to higher authorities (at any level), that submission is to an authority representative of the churches over which it is set. In terms of the contemporary missionary strategy of the Church, authority is vested at each level in bodies which both represent and serve the local Christian communities. Within the structures of decision-making the Church gives a special place to those who are its ordained representative persons; it also listens, where relevant, with especial attentiveness both to ordained persons and to laypersons who serve it with special expertise, but it is ultimately the whole people of God, who, through the relevant decision-making bodies, express their affirmation, or otherwise, of the strategies placed before them.
- 4.6.7 In terms both of Methodist tradition and the law of the land, supreme authority is vested within the Conference, which meets annually. The Conference is the final arbiter on matters of policy and doctrine. The *Deed of Union* states that:

the Conference shall be the final authority within the Methodist Church with regard to all questions concerning the interpretation of its doctrines.

A special responsibility for doctrine lies with the Faith and Order Committee, appointed by and responsible to the Conference. The authority of the Conference in secular law rests upon the provisions of the Methodist Church Union Act of 1929, later replaced by the Methodist Church Act of 1976, which gave Conference the right to alter, after due consultation, the doctrinal clause of the *Deed of Union*¹.

- 4.6.8 Methodism continues to adhere to the connexional principle as a vital structural expression of the interdependence of all its churches. At a time of ecumenical dialogue it commends this principle to other churches, at the same time acknowledging that connexionalism is compatible with the patterns of ministry treasured by other traditions. For example, the Methodist Church has already, in many joint ventures with the United Reformed Church, entered into the tradition of lay eldership, recognizing its affinity with the Methodist tradition of lay class leadership.
- 4.6.9 Connexionalism has other ecumenical implications. A connexional understanding of the Church recognizes the need for ministries of unity and oversight (*episcopate*) within the universal fellowship of believers. In the Anglican-Methodist Conversations, and in the subsequent Covenanting Proposals, the British Methodist Church expressed a readiness to accept *episcopate* in the form of bishops. The Conference of 1982 agreed that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would not violate Methodist doctrinal standards, provided that bishops, like everyone else, were subject to Conference. If in practice episcopacy serves to reinforce the unity and *koinonia* of the whole Church, it is to be welcomed². Thus episcopacy can be a valuable witness, (though not the only witness) to continuity in and faithfulness to the apostolic tradition.
- 4.6.10 In practice, Methodism has found that this ministry of 'oversight' may be exercised by corporate bodies as well as by individuals. In British Methodism the annual Conference has ultimate oversight; in Districts and Circuits Chairmen and Superintendents exercise that ministry. In American Methodism bishops and the local and general Conferences complement each other in this work.
- 4.6.11 A similar point may be made, in the light of the connexional principle, about a universal primacy such as the papacy. In the national and international dialogues of recent decades between Methodists and Roman Catholics, Methodists have affirmed that, if it could be shown that such a ministry was essential to the unity of the Church, then, by that token it must be part of God's will for the Church. In the Methodist view, such a ministry would need to be exercised in partnership and consultation with the whole people of God. At present, Roman Catholics and Methodists are not entirely agreed on what is 'essential' for the whole Church. Is the

papacy essential, or desirable for the reasons already given? Methodists could not accept all aspects of papal ministry as it is currently exercised, but would be more open to a universal primacy understood as a ministry of service and unity rather than primarily as a seat of authority. In effect, Methodists rule out no development compatible with our ethos which strengthens the unity and effectiveness in mission of the Church.

Notes:

- (1) On the subject of authority see also 1.2.9 and 2.4.5-6.
- (2) Two comments in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* should be noted in this context: whilst the episcopal succession may be appreciated as 'a sign, though not a guarantee of the continuity and unity of the Church', 'It is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate'. From this it follows that such churches, including of course, the Methodist Church, 'cannot accept any suggestion that the ministry exercised in their own tradition should be invalid until the moment that it enters into an existing line of episcopal succession' (BEM M37-8).

For a fuller understanding of recent Methodist thinking about episcopacy the following Conference reports should be consulted: *Methodism and Episcopacy* (1978), *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church* (1981), *Episcopacy and Methodist Doctrinal Standards* (1982) and *Episcopacy* (1998).

4.7 Methodist Ecclesiology and Church Structures

- 4.7.1 It will have become apparent by now that Methodist ecclesiology, whilst having much in common with that of other Christian Churches, has some distinctive emphases. These are essentially threefold: first, an emphasis on 'relatedness' as essential to the concept of 'church', finding expression in 'the connexional principle'; second, an emphasis, stemming from Methodism's societal past, on fellowship and shared discipline, exercised through small groups, and, third, the conviction that the Church should be structured for mission, and able to respond pragmatically, when new needs or opportunities arise. In this section of this Statement we review the existing structures of the British Methodist Church in the light of these convictions.
- 4.7.2 In the last half century, the context in which our structures have been operated has changed enormously¹. In particular, the numerical decline of the British Methodist Church has meant that some Circuits, and perhaps some Districts, no longer constitute meaningful or workable units, even though many Circuits have been amalgamated and Districts have been reorganized. Closer ecumenical ties have meant that, in many places, Methodist churches have closer links with churches of other Christian traditions than with other Methodist churches. In view of these considerations, what can be said about our structures?
- 4.7.3 First, the local church has the task of sharing in the whole ministry of Christ both in its neighbourhood through worship, fellowship, pastoral

care, mission and service, and also in the wider world by its prayers, gifts and outreach. Such outreach may, in effect, be an exchange, since the local church receives, as well as gives. But in the local church something akin to the principle of subsidiarity operates²: the more local the issue, problem or opportunity, the more local the jurisdiction which applies to it. The various committees of the local church, supervised by the Church Council, reflect at their best the interdependence and collaboration of the whole church in the fulfilment of its task. This does not mean that majority decisions are always, and minority views never, correct (particularly if the structures of a church exclude those already marginalized). But this essentially collaborative character of ministry is all the greater in the Methodist Church because an ordained presbyteral minister normally has responsibility for more than one church. This, together with the itinerancy of the majority of ministers, makes all the more necessary the partnership between laypeople and ordained ministers, whether presbyteral or diaconal, which is implicit in the Methodist understanding of the Church³.

- 4.7.4 The grouping of local churches in Circuits reflects the Methodist belief that no local church is an autonomous unit complete in itself. Rather, it is linked essentially and structurally to the wider Church. Circuit structures represent interdependence, relatedness, mutual responsibility and submission to mutual jurisdiction. Indeed, the Circuit, rather than the local church, has been the primary church unit in British Methodism. The appointment of Superintendent Ministers, with overall responsibility for the sharing within the Circuit of pastoral work, and for the preaching plan indicates the corporate, interdependent character of the Church. The Circuit system also makes possible the deployment of resources in an area wider than that of the local church. Here the original emphasis of Methodism can become very weak. Yet a renewed experience of interdependence, (not necessarily within Methodism alone), a more collaborative understanding of ministry, and readiness to use the gifts of ordained and lay people alike where the needs are greatest can breathe new life into semi-redundant structures. Thus, what is often impossible for the individual local church (e.g. church planting, effective work in educational institutions, industry etc.) becomes more practicable on a circuit basis.
- 4.7.5 Just as local churches are formed into Circuits ‘for mutual encouragement and help’, so Circuits are arranged in Districts ‘in like manner’⁴. Districts make possible what cannot be achieved by Circuits, because they are too small, or by the connexion, because it is too large. A District, under the leadership of a presbyteral minister, also provides a further structural link with the wider Church. Its boundaries are best determined by ecclesiological, rather than financial factors. That means, a District exists to foster interdependence between churches, to promote fellowship, exchanges and cooperation between churches sharing similar problems, opportunities, and, sometimes, a distinctive culture. In practice, this may often mean that District boundaries will coincide with local authority ones, but not necessarily so.

- 4.7.6 At both district and connexional level the relatedness of the whole Church requires the deployment of resources, including ministers, in areas of greatest need. Methodist land and buildings, therefore, are held on the 'Model Trusts' for which the custodian trustees are a connexional body, with local Church Councils, Circuit Meetings and District Trustees being the managing trustees. On the same principle, the Conference assesses each District for contributions, and allocates the money to assist in the work of the wider Church. (The Districts assess Circuits for these contributions, and the local churches provide the financial resources for the Circuits). Finally, the connexional character of the church can be seen in the various ways in which the Conference, or the President of the Conference, seeks to lead, or to express the mind of the whole Church.
- 4.7.7 The financial implications of this understanding of the Church are far-reaching, as the New Testament itself makes clear. Here it must be acknowledged that human self-centredness often weakens the interdependence of the Church. Many people find their interest and loyalty are concentrated on their local church; the sense of belonging to a Circuit is not strong – to say nothing of belonging to a District or a Connexion. The need for Connexional funds and officers may be questioned, or the importance of some areas of the Church's life compared unfavourably with others. Inadequate consultation or communication may be a further problem, hindering understanding between local churches and the Connexion. Such tensions inevitably make it more difficult to allocate resources in the best way for the mission and life of the Church. But to acknowledge the imperfections of the Church must lead, not to cynicism or despair, but to continuing repentance.
- 4.7.8 The nature of the Church as an international community properly finds expression in international structures. Until two or three decades ago, the connexion of the British Methodist Church also included most of the overseas Methodist Churches founded by missionaries sent out from Britain. Most of these are now autonomous Churches in independent countries, but British Methodism still maintains strong links with them through prayer, the sharing of information, the sending and receiving of personnel and cross-representation at Conference level. Methodist Churches throughout the world are represented on the World Methodist Council, which has no authority over member bodies, but provides opportunities for fellowship and consultation. Regional or continental structures may also be needed to bridge the gap between British and World Methodism⁴. At this international level, the connexional principle propels Methodist Churches towards a sharing of resources which crosses both denominational and national boundaries.
- 4.7.9 From its beginnings, Methodism has been pragmatic in its approach to questions of church structure and order. Its own order and discipline emerged largely as the result of a series of *ad hoc* experiments. They were created in the 'missionary' situation of the eighteenth century, and the

legacy of this has been a tendency to subordinate church order to, and to deploy church resources in response to, the missionary needs of the Church. This is, or should be, a particular strength of a 'connexional' Church, in which there is a common recognition that all are parts of a larger whole.

- 4.7.10 But there are challenges to be faced and warnings to be heeded. Here three in particular may be mentioned. First, Methodist origins invite the question whether the Church's structures help its members to grow in holiness. If the class meeting has largely gone, what has taken its place? Second, the Methodist Church, like others, faces the danger of becoming ponderous and inflexible; structures adapted to one missionary situation become perpetuated as hindrances to missionary activity in another. Third, in replacing those structures, there is the danger of being guided exclusively by the pastoral needs of settled congregations turned in on themselves.
- 4.7.11 Not without self-criticism, therefore, the Methodist Church, pointing to its own origins, and to Scripture, holds to the conviction that the Holy Spirit leads the Church to adapt its structures as it faces new situations and challenges. This flexibility is itself an important principle, rooted in Scripture, theology and experience. Methodists, therefore, should not feel the need resolutely to defend the structures of the Methodist Church. This is true of much, if not all, traditional Methodist terminology, including 'Circuit' and 'Connexion'. The underlying principles, however, of interdependence and relatedness, reflected in appropriate local, district, and national structures, of small-group fellowship and discipline, and of a flexibility which enables to the Church to be more effectively structured for mission, will, it is hoped, be contributed by Methodism to a larger whole.

Notes:

- (1) See 1.2.1-6.
- (2) See 4.6.2.
- (3) See also 4.5.4.
- (4) *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, Vol. 2, p.228.

CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This Statement has been written at a time uncongenial in many ways to the life and growth of the Churches of Western Europe. They face a time of rapid change in cultures which are profoundly individualistic, secular and materialistic. But in such a context the fundamental questions of human life remain: to what values and goals are we human beings to give our absolute allegiance? In what kind of society do human beings best flourish? How may a person find true fulfilment and happiness? Why should, and how can, justice be established on earth? Is there an ultimate

reality who/which gives final meaning and purpose to creation? As members of the Methodist Church we affirm our faith that the fundamental answer to questions such as these lies in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- 5.2 At the heart of this Gospel is the revelation that God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, embraces the world, each member of the human race, and every living creature, with a love which not only creates, but re-creates and heals in the face of humankind's tragic, self-centred fragmentation. This is God's 'mission' to the world: God does not exist in isolation or detachment from creation, but with the passionate care of a father or mother engages with it, inviting humankind to find its lasting centre and home in the divine love. This love is the ultimate, inescapable centre and framework of all things. For this reason the Bible bears witness to the 'Kingdom' of God, for God, in spite of the dark abysses of human history, suffering and even death, 'reigns'. The climax to the Biblical testimony to both the mission and kingdom of God is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus – God's ultimate act of solidarity with and sacrifice for the world, and God's definitive victory over evil. Out of this Gospel, the Church gladly acknowledges its vocation to celebrate the love of God in its worship, to share his life in its fellowship, and to be the agent of his generosity and compassion in a needy world.
- 5.3 The Church has always been unworthy to be the bearer of such good news. It has not always been evident that Christian faith makes people more, not less human, more, not less loving. But in spite of its tragic, continuing failure, the Church remains called to live and proclaim the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, above all by reflecting in itself the suffering and love, life and hope which were focussed supremely in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. That also means, Christians are called to express their God-given unity in a world whose several parts are closer than ever before, yet still deeply divided.
- 5.4 The Church for which this Statement is primarily written, the British Methodist Church, may cease to exist as a separate Church entity during the twenty-first century, if continuing progress towards Christian unity is made. If that happens, it is to be hoped that Methodism will be able to contribute some of the riches of its own distinctive history to any future Church. Whatever the future holds, it is vital that a vision for the Church – and for each local church – should be inspired and maintained by Scripture and tradition, by contemporary experience and need, and, not least, by the Holy Spirit firing imagination, mind and heart.
- 5.5 What kind of community, then, might a church be?
- A community which celebrates and proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - A community of all ages, different races, varying backgrounds and occupations – richly diverse, but united around the Lord's Table.

- A community which praises God.
- A community nourished each week by great songs of faith, by prayers steeped in the wealth of the Christian tradition and contemporary experience, and by preaching which engages with contemporary life and with the Bible at depth and with integrity.
- A community whose warm fellowship is matched by the warmth of its welcome, offering ‘ a home from home for all’,¹ who will come.
- A community bearing, but not bowed down by, particular acts of service to which it has been called in its particular time and place.
- A community resilient with the hope inspired by a vision of God’s kingdom.
- A community committed to working for justice and peace.
- A community the daily lives of whose members make it easier for others to believe in the goodness of God.
- A community gentle with each others’ failures, as each sustains and is sustained by others through forgiveness, love and prayer.
- A community characterized by joy.

5.6 The challenge remains for this Church, as for other Churches, to journey on in faith, love and hope. It is called to live by faith in the God whose undeserved generosity remains the alpha and omega of the Church’s very existence. It is challenged to live in love, the mark of holiness, for God and for people made in his image. It is upheld by the hope that, because of God, nothing is inevitable, neither the decline of the Church, nor the self-destruction of the world, in the midst of which the Church continues to testify to God’s loving purposes.

5.7 Hope, in fact, is the note on which a Statement such as this should end. For nothing of the Church’s life, worship and mission can be properly understood, unless it is seen in the light of the final fulfilment of God’s purposes. Time and history are not absolutes, and the Church, traveller through time and history, has a provisionality which it all too easily forgets. In the meantime, in the providence of God, it must hold to Christ, seeking renewal, remaining with and for the world, and join its praises with the Church in heaven as it awaits the coming Kingdom.

Note:

- (1) A phrase taken from Roger McGough’s poem written for the opening of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts *Called to Love and Praise* as a Conference Statement.

(Agenda 1999, pp.157-215)

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2 Entry into the Church

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(i) Baptism

CHRISTIAN INITIATION (1987)

A. CHRISTIAN INITIATION

The Plymouth Conference of 1982 requested 'a thorough examination at a fundamental level of the whole theology and practice of Christian initiation in the Methodist Church'. The immediate cause of this resolution was the fact that there have been a few of our ministers who feel unable in conscience to baptise infants and that our present, and indeed historic and often affirmed, rules require that they cease to serve. But there are other issues. The world wide movement of renewal, which will be described in more detail below, has meant that many who have entered, sometimes charismatically, into the experience of liberation in Christ wish to leave the past behind and to seal this by the Gospel Sacrament of Baptism. If they have already been baptised as infants, they feel that this was probably a social custom, meaningless to them who were without conscious awareness of it. They clamour, not so much for second baptism. as for 'the real thing' and various provisions for the renewal of vows they never made, for example in Confirmation or the Methodist Covenant Service, or in each Eucharist, seem a travesty. The water, the Scriptural sign, is essential. Some indeed are almost resentful of having been baptised as infants. They feel cheated. There is some feeling that infant baptism and believers' baptism are different ordinances and should be recognised as such. There are also demands for a Service of Infant Dedication or Thanksgiving, as an alternative to Baptism.

All this has revived a long-standing disquiet, voiced for more than thirty years, and shared by many who are convinced paedobaptists. Is not indiscriminate baptism impossible to justify? Must not the sacrament be confined to the children of those parents who take the promises seriously and are themselves visibly in Christ?

Needless to say none of these grave matters is a problem peculiar to the Methodist Church. Opposition to indiscriminate baptism was loud in the Anglican 'Parish and People Movement' in the 1950s, while all the Churches which are heirs of Western Christendom are faced with the clamours, indeed the 'heart-cries', of the 'renewed'.

Scope of the Report

We have looked again at the New Testament, though we have focused on the teaching which bears most closely on the issues outlined. In this way the various emphases within the NT are clearly acknowledged without cloaking disagreement on various points of exegesis or being side-tracked into less relevant matters of speculation or dispute. We then survey the evidence from Christian experience throughout Church history, with an obviously important section on Methodism, but also giving considerable space to the early Fathers, into whose doctrine the NT itself merges, and who may have in the past been neglected in Protestant evangelical discussions, though they were important to Wesley and the Reformers before him. Their problems were not identical with ours; yet they were fighting in the different conditions of their time against some of the same distortions of the Christian faith, e.g. the Gnostic divorce between the activity of God in creation and

salvation. We notice the responses of other communions to the problems which are now almost universal.

We are, however, in search of a 'breakthrough'.

Perhaps the major problem which has made this report necessary is that most recent treatments of baptism written from within particular denominations tend to drive the exposition and argument to an either/or – in bald terms, the either/or of grace or faith. **Either** baptism has to be seen as itself a paradigm and expression of God's prevenient grace reaching out to us before we are even aware of it. **Or** baptism is an expression of or witness to the faith whereby the individual responds to that grace. Posed thus, most treatments of baptism contend either for infant baptism or believers' baptism as mutually exclusive interpretations – mutually exclusive in that a believers' baptist will not recognise infant baptism as valid, and a paedobaptist will refuse to allow one baptised in infancy to discount that baptism and undergo baptism (again) as a believer. This problem emerges out of different emphases put on the relation between baptism and the gospel – the one seeing baptism as essentially **an expression of** the gospel, the other seeing baptism as essentially **response to** the gospel. Can a way be found out of the impasse by reminding ourselves of the character of the gospel, without involving ourselves in further unresolved argument?

Secondly, there is the question whether there may not be social and psychological insights both in the past and of our time, which, without offering another any false gospel, may revive the authentic traditions of Catholic and evangelical Christianity in a unity of redeemed nature and grace, which manifestly speaks to our one world? Has the Church used rites and symbols adequately? The waters of baptism are half-frozen in formality and trickle into the token gestures of people half-afraid of the power of signs. Thus we fail both the natural man and those Christians who claim to have received an especial gift of grace. There is also the need to look beyond rites to the life into which we are initiated. What does it mean to have been baptised?

Some Important Preliminaries

1. Glossary of terms

a) Sacrament

This is not properly a NT word, though **Sacramentum** was the most frequent Latin translation of the NT Greek **Mysterion**, which means mystery or secret. The latter usually refers to the hidden things of God which are disclosed in Jesus Christ (Eg. Mark 4:11 and parallels, Eph.5.32). 'It speaks of revelation not ritual' (Alasdair Heron, **Table and Tradition**, Handsel Press 1983 p.55). Nevertheless, no religion can survive without rites and ceremonies which embody and continue its traditions, bring together its adherents and unite them in a common action, and point beyond themselves to the reality which is believed to be at the heart of faith and practice. Thus the sacramental idea and sacramental theology are as legitimate for Christian believers as they are inevitable. And 'a good case can still be made out for at least an indirect dominical institution' of Baptism and the Eucharist (Donald Baillie, **The Theology of the Sacraments**, Faber and Faber, 1964 edn. p.42). But there is need to be careful not to impose later meanings on the NT. For us a Sacrament discloses and proclaims what God has done for the world in Christ and **conveys** (to use a term

Wesley took over from the Caroline divines) its benefits to the believing community.

b) **Baptism**

This means literally dipping or submergence and it has from the beginnings of Christianity been the ceremony of initiation into the Church, though art and architecture as well as the climate of Palestine suggest that it was not always done by total immersion. Jewish proselytes were baptised as well as circumcised at least from the beginning of the Second Century: the Qumran sect practised ritual washing. John 'the Baptist' was given his nickname because he baptised. But the idea of baptism was taken up and enriched by association with the Holy Spirit and the death of Christ, and used in this enriched sense particularly by Paul. And the rite attracted to itself other rites which were added to initiation by water. In the story of the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descended and the voice from heaven proclaimed him God's Son, or Messiah, the Lord's anointed, as he emerged from the Jordan. In Acts 8 the Holy Spirit was not given to the baptised Samaritans until the apostles from Jerusalem had laid on hands. Quite soon, therefore, oil was used in initiation and also some form of the laying on of hands, or in the earliest rites, 'hand', from which Confirmation evolved. The term 'Baptism' sometimes refers to the ceremony with water, sometimes to a complex of Initiation rites, though in the last quarter of the Fourth Century, the Church Order, known as the **Apostolic Constitutions** states clearly: 'But if there be neither oil nor chrism, the water is sufficient both for the anointing and the seal and for the confession of him that is dead, or indeed is dying together with (Christ)'. We ourselves regard Baptism with water as the Sacrament of Initiation into the life of Christ, and his people. Additional rites are in some circumstances called for to make possible a personal confession of faith, or in some sense to 'renew baptism'; but they are adjuncts and subsidiary. 'The Water is sufficient'.

c) **Membership**

This originated in the Pauline doctrine of the church as the Body of Christ with its various members, i.e. limbs or organs. Paul seems this way to identify Christ and the Church; in the words of a Wesley hymn on the Lord's Supper 'Christ and his Church are one' (**Hymns and Psalms** 622). Cf. the language of John 15 about Vine and Branches. Membership therefore means incorporation into Christ. Is this the same as belonging to the local, visible Church, which may seem little different from a respectable and religious club? Are there those 'paid-up' in the Church who are not members of Christ? Our claim is that all the baptised are 'in Christ' and although the membership may not realise its potential, or indeed be damaged, even to some being cut off from the source of life in him, to be baptised is as solemn and glorious as the NT metaphors of union would imply.

2. **Scripture and Tradition**

The traditional theology of Christian baptism has never attempted a complete justification from Scripture alone. This is in fact true of all Christian theology and is inevitable since even if all subsequent developments were ignored, a future generation cannot interpret Scripture as though its members lived in the first century, and those who have tried to take their stand on Scripture alone have often been most conditioned by their own time and would have bewildered the writers of the NT. Tradition is not necessarily the letter of a dead legalism; it may be the

handing on of a continuing and ever-developing experience, the fulfilment of the promise of fuller understanding and greater works. It needs to be tested by the record of the original revelation ever pondered and interpreted by new knowledge, by the common mind of believers, and by the insights and discoveries of the love of God in Christ active in each new age. Tradition has content (1 Cor. 15:3ff); but it also includes experience, perhaps a 'more living' term. This is also 'handed on' and needs to be tested by the means described.

John Wesley's **Notes on the New Testament**, one of our Church's doctrinal standards, offers us a model approach to Scripture as a source of doctrine. In particular, the **Notes** establish these principles among us:

- to use the best available scholarship (textual, historical, exegetical);
- to use the scholarship available from any source without confessional prejudice;
- to open our interpretation to the judgement of the whole Christian world for its counsel;
- to follow the movement of Scripture from one proposition or vantage-point to the next, for in that movement and progression itself is an essential element of divine revelation.

This last principle enables us to make positive use of the results of the most searching critical examinations of recent times. Where diversity and development are shown up by such research, these factors may have for us a theological importance of their own: it is the **direction** in which God leads his people (the Scripture authors and editors among them) which concerns us, just as much as the particular insights vouchsafed as distinct moments in the process.

Baptism in the New Testament

1. The gospel and baptism

There would be no dispute on two aspects of the gospel presented in the NT.

- a) **The gospel as offer of forgiveness/acceptance.** So Jesus characterised his own ministry, eg. in Mark 2:17 and Luke 7:36-50. It was precisely the sinners, those discounted by the righteous within Israel whom Jesus welcomed. Similarly Paul's message of justification was the offer of God's acceptance to the Gentiles, equally discounted by the righteous as standing outside the covenant people (eg. Rom. 4:9-11).
- b) **The gospel as offer of repentance/faith.** Again we find common ground between Jesus and Paul, as such passages as Mark 1:15 and Rom. 1:16-17 make clear.

Both aspects of course are well known and given place in the either-or of paedobaptism or believers' baptism: the paedobaptists usually emphasising the faith of parents, sponsors and believing community; believers' baptists usually emphasising the God-giveness of faith, faith as response to the prior grace of God. But a third aspect of the gospel prominent in the NT is often neglected.

- c) **The openness of the gospel offer as itself a criticism of those who would restrict the grace of God.** Jesus proclaimed his gospel precisely in opposition to those who restricted God's grace to the righteous and denied it to the sinner, and who restricted it precisely by reference to the law and by their ritual practice

(Mark 2:23-5; 7:1-23; Luke 13:10-17). Paul similarly maintained his gospel precisely in opposition to those who wanted to restrict God's grace to the chosen race and to deny it to the Gentile as such, and who did so precisely by making the ritual act of circumcision the make or break issue (Gal. 2-5).

There is clearly a warning here that the openness of the gospel's offer can become too restricted by ritual requirements or practices.

d) **The gospel as an invitation to join the community of the new age.**

While the call comes to individuals, the corporate dimension is implicit throughout the New Testament: the body of Christ is the obvious Pauline expression of this, (1 Cor. 12), but even the apparently individualistic Johannine Gospel has the vine and its branches (John 15:1-10). Furthermore, baptism is not something one does oneself, but something done to one by others, and by which one is incorporated into the community.

e) **The gospel confirms the covenant with Israel, and extends its prerogatives to all concerned.** 'God's gifts and call are irrevocable' (Rom. 11:29) is the conclusion of Paul's discussion of the relationship between the gospel of Jesus and God's existing commitment to Israel. The earliest preaching of baptism to Jews, described in Acts 2 (particularly v.39), extends God's covenant with succeeding generations of his people to the Gentiles. The subsequent necessity, during the early generations of the predominantly Gentile mission of the Church, of emphasising the strangeness of the Gospel to those of pagan parentage does not invalidate the principle that the children born in the community of faith have their place in the covenant.

2. **The baptismal texts**

There are quite a number of texts where a reference to baptism as such is disputed, particularly in Paul – the washing language of 1 Cor. 6:11, Eph. 5:26 and Tit. 3:5 (a spiritual or physical cleansing or both? – cf. Acts 15:9, Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 1 John 1:7,9), and the seal of the Spirit talk in 2 Cor. 1:22, and Eph. 1:13, 4:30 (where it is more likely the vividness of his converts' experience of the Spirit which is in view – cf. Gal. 3:2-5; 4:6-7 Phil. 3:3). But there are sufficient passages where baptismal language is used in one way or another for us to proceed.

a) **Passages where the divine initiative comes to the fore:** particularly the use of the 'divine passive' (to denote an action accomplished by God) in Rom. 6:3-4, Gal. 3:27 and Col. 2:12, possibly also John 3:5; and the possibility of arguing that God was thought to mediate his forgiveness through baptism in Acts 2:38 and 22:16. Also to be mentioned here is the more involved argument for the solidarity of the household of faith, so that those given by birth to members of the covenant people are to be counted as members of that people. Reference is usually made to Acts 2:39 and 1 Cor. 7:14. That baptism is the inevitable corollary can be argued from the parallel with circumcision in the old covenant (though see (d) below), and from the household baptisms in Acts 16:15, 33, 18:8 and 1 Cor. . 1:16 (though it is equally likely that 'household' denotes retainers and slaves without implying the presence of children). There is insufficient evidence for the view that already within the first century spiritual birth was identified with baptism, particularly where it is the creative power of the word which is being given prominence (cf. Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 3:9).

b) **Passages where the repentance/faith of the baptisand is to the fore.**

John's baptism was characterised as a baptism of repentance (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13.24; 19.4). A similar emphasis is clear in Acts 2.38,41. 8.12-13, 16.14-15, 33-4, 18.8 and 19.2-3. The language of being baptised 'into the name of Christ' (Acts 8.16; 19.5) is probably drawn from the commercial world, where 'into the name of' was used in transaction: to be baptised in the name of someone was to be made over to him, to become his disciple (1 Cor. 1.12-13). And the nearest thing to a definition of baptism in the NT defines it as an 'appeal to God for a clear conscience' or 'pledge to God of a clear conscience' or 'a demand in the name of God for a good orientation of the will' (1 Pet. 3.21). At the same time, the fact that these references all appear in contexts in which the gospel is being preached to non-Christians in a pre-Christian culture, at least raises the question whether they would be equally applicable where Christianity has been the 'established' religion.

In short, in neither case is the NT evidence so clear cut as to require the expositor to make an either-or choice between paedobaptism and believers' baptism.

- c) Less easy to dispute is **the consistent emphasis on the once-for-allness of Christian baptism**. It was precisely the once-for-allness of John's baptism which distinguished it from the regular ablutions of ritual purification particularly as practised in the Qumran community. John also gave the rite profound eschatological significance – baptism as a way of preparing for or escaping from the wrath to come (Matt. 3.7); as symbolising and preparing for the decisive acts of final judgement by the Coming One (Matt. 3.10-12). This finally decisive character of entering upon discipleship of Jesus, of transfer to Christ's Lordship, is emphasised in the 'already' emphasis of such passages as John 5.24 and Col. 1.13, and linked with baptism particularly in the death and burial imagery of Rom. 6.3-4 and Col. 2.12, and probably the birth from above imagery of John 3.5. And though the same imagery can be used both for the decisive beginnings of the Christian life and for its ongoing discipline of renewal (cf. Gal. 3.27 and Rom. 13.14; Rom 6.5 with Phil. 3.10), there is no suggestion that repeated baptism was ever thought of as an option for Christians (note Eph. 4.5). There is a once-for-allness about entry into the new age, into the new covenant, which Heb. 6.4-6 in particular is concerned to safeguard, and which the once-for-allness of baptism was seen to express.

In fact, the lack of a NT precedent for a repetition of baptism in the name of Christ is a striking feature of the NT witness. The twelve 'disciples' of Acts 19.1-7 had previously known only John's baptism, and were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus presumably because they had not received the Spirit; whereas Apollos in Acts 18.24-28, who likewise knew only John's baptism, was apparently not 're-baptised', presumably because he was already 'aglow with the Spirit' (18.25; cf. the disciples at Pentecost who had previously received only John's baptism). Most striking of all is the case of the Samaritans (Acts 8). Like the twelve at Ephesus (Acts 19) they had not received the Spirit. But they were **not** re-baptised by Peter and John. The difference must be that the baptism they had received was 'in the name of Jesus' (8.16). Despite the fact that their previous initiation had not been effective so far as the gift of the Spirit was concerned, they were not re-baptised.

At the same time, bound up with the whole complex is a warning, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, **not to put too much weight on the ritual moment** in the whole process. John the Baptist used the imagery of baptism to express the Coming One's work – 'he will baptise in Holy Spirit and fire' (Matt. 3.11) – where it is clear that something other than John's baptism in water is in view (cf. Isa. 30.27-28; Mark 10.38). The accounts of what happened to Jesus in his encounter with John at the Jordan are consistent in passing quickly over the actual baptism to focus attention primarily on Jesus' anointing with the Spirit (particularly Luke 3.21-22; John 1.32-34; cf. Acts 10.37-38). Jesus himself did not practice baptism; or even more significant, if he did so initially he soon abandoned the practice (John 3.22; 4.1-2). Acts 1.5 and 11.16 repeat the Baptist's contrast between his baptising in water and Christians' experience of being baptised in the Spirit; and a related disjunction between baptism and the gift of the Spirit is attested in Acts 8.12-17 and 10.44-48, where it is the gift of the Spirit on which the issue of discipleship and salvation really hangs (8.16; 11.4-18; 19.2). Similarly the single reference John 3.5 has to be set alongside the stronger emphasis on birth as from the Spirit (3.5-8), on the Spirit as Life-giver (6.63) as symbolised by a river of living water (4.10,14; 7.38-39).

To the same effect is Paul's argument against the necessity of circumcision, despite the explicit warnings of Gen. 17.9-14. What mattered was the circumcision 'made without hands' (Col. 2:11), the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2.28-29) which the gift of the Spirit effected (Phil. 3.3). It was the presence of the Spirit which defined the Christian (Rom.8.9). Reception of the Spirit rendered circumcision unnecessary (Gal. 3.3). For Paul the Spirit had replaced circumcision as the hallmark of the covenant people (2 Cor. 3.3,6), the Spirit's manifest activity in a life serving as sign and seal of the new covenant in the way that circumcision had served for the old (Jer. 31.31.-34; 2 Cor. 1.22; cf. Rom. 4.11). With such an emphasis, Paul's relative depreciation of baptism in 1 Cor. 1.17, following upon his congratulation of the Corinthians' spiritual endowment in 1.4-7, should not occasion any surprise. And the likelihood increases that in 1 Cor. 12.13 he had in mind the outpouring of the Spirit on the Corinthians without necessarily implying that that outpouring was tied to the ritual act of baptism, (though most commentators assume that Paul is speaking of baptism as such).

It should also be borne in mind that Baptism occurs as one of a series of experiences and events through which believers go and that in the NT the place of Baptism in relation to other experiences and events varied from one to the other. It bore a different relationship to event and experience, for the disciples of Jesus (one assumes they **were** baptised); for those baptised on the day of Pentecost; and then for those referred to in Acts 19. The degree of the appreciation of the meaning of baptism varies from person to person and experience to experience according to the context in which it takes place.

The significance of Jesus' acceptance and blessing of children is not entirely clear for the present purposes, though an established part of our baptismal liturgy (Mark 10.13-16). The episode certainly indicates Jesus' readiness to receive and bless little children; but that is not disputed by any Christian. What remains unclear is whether baptism is the equivalent today (bearing in mind that Jesus himself did not baptise). Jesus blesses children brought to him whether they are baptised or not, and, indeed, says 'of such are the Kingdom of God'.

Christian parents seeking such a blessing should therefore not be discouraged either by the Church's denying their children baptism if that is what the parents wish, or by insisting that the blessing must be tied to baptism even if the parents do not wish it.

3. Conclusions

- a) The NT evidence is not sufficiently clear to resolve the question of whether paedobaptism or believers' baptism is the more appropriate expression of and response to the gospel. On the other hand a baptismal practice which does not hold grace and faith in sufficient balance, such as 'indiscriminate baptism', is much less easy to justify from the NT precisely for that reason.
- b) The NT gives no encouragement to the idea that baptism in the name of Christ is repeatable. On the contrary, the once-for-allness of its symbolism of death and birth is a prominent feature of the NT teaching and precedent for a second Christian baptism is lacking, even for a case where the reality of the Spirit came significantly later than the ritual act of baptism. Indeed Christian baptism was only given to those who had already received John's baptism when the Spirit had **not** been received: the gift of the Spirit so fulfilled the expectation even of a less than Christian baptism that proper Christian baptism was evidently considered unnecessary. For those who regard the NT as providing their rule of faith and life this must be a weighty consideration.
- c) The danger of making too much of the ritual moment does not provide a decisive argument in determining the either-or of paedobaptism or believers' baptism. It could be developed as an argument against paedobaptism. But it could equally be developed as an argument against any insistence that baptism must provide expression for faith newly awakened. Its force is rather to warn against pushing the choice between paedobaptism and believers' baptism to an either-or. It is the insistence that only one of these teachings is right and the other wrong which offends against the openness of Jesus and the NT's qualification of the ritual moment, rather than the teachings themselves. It is not paedobaptism which is excluded so much as the attitude which refuses to countenance paedobaptism. It is not so much that believers' baptism is commended as the vitality of faith and the Spirit's activity in a life, without tying those necessarily to the ritual moment.

Evidence from Christian Experience

1. The Fathers and After

a) Theological Understanding of Baptism

Theodore of Mopsuestia (d.428) speaks of the Sacraments as 'awe-inspiring mysteries'. It is quite clear that for Theodore the future world is anticipated in the present. Baptism symbolises the transfer from one order or condition to another. Both baptism and eucharist perform sacramentally the events that took place in connection with Christ, in the belief that what happened to him will happen to us. Passion and resurrection are re-enacted so that the believer can participate in the action: 'we believe that through these symbols, as through unspeakable signs, we possess sometime before hand the realities themselves.' As the newborn baby is weak, so the newly baptised possesses only potentially

the faculties of his immortal nature, but that possession is the ground of his future hope and of his present actions; for he should endeavour to live in a manner worthy of his heavenly citizenship.

There are ways in which Theodore is not entirely typical of the Patristic material. He was so profoundly conscious of the radical difference between old covenant and new that his scriptural exegesis was felt to be shocking in its rejection of the Christological understanding of the Old Testament. His tendency to contrast 'Man-in-Adam' and 'Man-in-Christ' led to certain Christological emphases which were later judged to be Nestorian. Yet his clear grasp of eschatological perspectives, though sharper than is generally found, illuminates the Patristic attitude to baptism as a radical transfer from one realm or allegiance to another. A striking feature of the Catechetical Homilies of John Chrysostom which have become available in this century is the vivid sense that the baptised are transferring from one side to another in a real conflict between God and the devil. They are now soldiers of Christ; faith is a contract made with God through the Spirit. The newly enlisted must expect ambush and attack from the enemy; he must be alert and renounce his old ways. Baptism is not simply a washing away of sin, but a melting down and re-moulding, or a bath or re-birth. Thus the sense of 'new creation in Christ' was never entirely lost as New Testament 'realised eschatology' waned and New Testament perceptions were overlaid with other images like **photismos** (illumination), **palingenesia** (re-birth), **theopoiesis** (deification), not to mention 'initiation' itself. A little earlier Cyril of Jerusalem presented the sacraments as a means whereby the believer passes from sin to righteousness, receives the Spirit and is united with Christ: 'Christ was really crucified, really buried and truly rose . . . in order that partaking in the imitation of his sufferings in truth we might gain salvation.' Chrism means that we become 'Christ's', anointed with the Holy Spirit. Theodore's attitudes stand within a consistent tradition, at a time when all the forces of history were working towards uniformity of belief and practice.

b) **Infant baptism and believers' baptism**

In this period, the majority of baptisms were still adult, but infant baptism was already practised. Clear evidence for infant baptism is only found in the early Third Century. Yet the desire to incorporate one's children into the people of the new covenant, the new community of the new age/world surely existed from the earliest times, and may well be reflected in references to the baptism of households (e.g. Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:16). The Jewish practice of circumcising infants as a sign of their incorporation into the people of the covenant provided an obvious model; the parallel is explicit in early Christian writings, already perhaps implicit in Col. 2:11f. Circumcision in the Spirit, which was often contrasted with Jewish circumcision according to the flesh, would naturally be associated with baptism, as long as it was regarded as baptism in water and the Spirit (but see below (c) (ii)). Christians were soon known as 'the third race' (i.e. neither Jew nor Gentile), and to become a Christian implied a membership and an allegiance as concrete as being born or adopted into a particular race or family – a child has little say about that. Yet 'believers' baptism' inevitably remained the norm as long as Christians were a minority in a predominantly pagan society, a situation which remained long after the conversion of Constantine. The collection of catechetical lectures with which we began can be paralleled in the West (the author of **De Mysteriis**, Ambrose and Augustine): bishops everywhere saw that 'training in Church membership' was conducted

during Lent, and baptism was an important and dramatic part of the Easter Liturgy.

c) **Doctrinal and Pastoral Problems associated with Baptism**

(i) One of the problematic issues faced by the Fathers arose out of the sense of radical transfer – namely the problem of postbaptismal sin. If baptism implied that sin was eliminated and re-creation had taken place, then perfection was to be expected once the sacrament had been performed. Heb. 6.4 was taken to mean that anyone who sinned after baptism was doomed. One solution was the development of the penitential system, against which the Reformation was such a profound protest at a later date. But in the context of the early Church it was a positive response to the problem of being in the world while theoretically not being of it: the rigorism of Novatianism had its attractions even into the Fifth Century, as Socrates the historian bears witness, but it was in practice untenable. The other solution was the widely attested practice of delaying baptism till one was on one's death-bed or preparing to take monastic vows, for in either case the risks of sinning afterwards were reduced. The fact that preachers speak so often against this tendency attests its popularity. Neither solution was without unfortunate consequences, the one encouraging the natural human tendency to clock up merits or sit loose to sin, the other creating two classes of Christians, the perfect ascetics and those who did not even try. Nevertheless the very existence of the problem bears witness to the instability of the New Testament's tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom and to the continued recognition that baptism implied a once-for-all eschatological transfer.

(ii) Another problem arose from a failure to hold together the two moments implicit in this dramatic transfer – namely, the washing away of the past and the entry into the new creation through reception of the 'seal of the Spirit'. Particularly in the West, the gift of the Spirit came to be associated with chrism or the laying on of hands by the bishop, baptism in water having been performed by a presbyter – the separation of baptism and confirmation was under way (G. W. H. Lampe, **The Seal of the Spirit**). Baptism itself was thus reduced to the symbolism of cleansing. This implies previous sin, and the reason for baptising infants became a matter for speculation. Certainly in the Second Century it was assumed that infants were innocent, and infant baptism does not seem to have originated from the idea that they needed cleansing (though Origen argued this – but then he thought we were all here because of pre-mundane sin). The Greek Fathers remained reluctant to consider new-born children sinful, and even Ambrose spoke of baptism opening the kingdom of heaven to them, rather than cleansing them. Still the established practice of baptising infants became an important argument for the doctrine of original sin once the meaning of baptism had been narrowed by the liturgical development to which attention has been drawn. Had the whole drama been held together the doctrinal arguments might not have followed precisely the same course. Yet the sense of transfer from one age to another, from one sphere to another, from belonging to Adam's race to that of Christ, was such that the notion of corporate sin and salvation could certainly have produced the same effect, in spite of the individualising and moralising tendencies of the Fathers.

(iii) The third issue concerned the baptism of heretics and schismatics. If such characters sought entry to the Church, should they be regarded as baptised or not? Cyprian thought not; Stephen, bishop of Rome, differed, recommending

the laying on of hands as alone necessary. Cyprian's answer may reflect a continued perception of the whole baptismal act as one, while Stephen's arose from a tendency to split the two phases, devaluing baptism and enhancing the rites performed by the bishop. But there were also other issues: did the validity of baptism depend upon the purity/soundness of the minister? or on the faith of the believer? or on God? Stephen's answer meant an emphasis upon God as the source of grace in baptism irrespective of human failing – a good theoretical position, yet potentially dangerous as it could turn baptism into a magic act in which the words spoken were efficacious no matter who spoke them or in what context. Nevertheless this position was reinforced by the later controversy with the Donatists. It was in that connection that Augustine distinguished between the validity of a sacrament and its efficaciousness: the sacrament is like a brand-mark which cannot be lost or effaced, so the baptism of schismatics is technically valid; yet the grace of the sacrament can only be received within the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. The same insistence upon the action of God is to be found in the East, Chrysostom for example insisting that the priest is merely the instrument who opens his mouth, while God accomplishes what is done. This emphasis bears some comparison with the paedo-baptists' insistence on the priority of God's grace.

d) Conclusions

A sense of radical transfer was paramount in the patristic understanding of baptism, though problems arose from failure to hold the whole drama together and to live with the 'eschatological tension' of the now and the not yet. These problems were not merely theoretical, however. They were problems with a practical pastoral dimension. A dying child had to be baptised to ensure its future salvation; salvation was forfeited if sin occurred after baptism, so a compassionate solution had to be found. The Fathers responded to the pastoral problems and modified the 'theory' to take account of practical challenges: post-baptismal sin was a real practical issue and the penitential system was a practical answer to it. Most problems surrounding baptism involve the difficulty of keeping in balance the divine re-creative act of grace and the human response; overemphasis on the first can produce a mechanical or magical view, overemphasis on the second can produce too moralistic and individual an emphasis.

If the Fathers retained the radical character of baptism in spite of such developments as post-baptismal sin and the lessening of the New Testament's eschatological tension, then to be true to the tradition, it is the **decisiveness** of baptism that must be retained. But two other points need to be emphasised: (i) the Fathers were well aware that baptism is but the beginning of a continual struggle to live 'between the ages' – as Theodore certainly perceived; (ii) the focus on radical transfer must not be allowed to obscure the Fathers' determination to hold creation and salvation together as one on-going activity of one God. To divorce the two results in a denial of the world and an elitism of the saved, which is almost entirely individualistic as well as esoteric. This was why the Fathers were implacably hostile to Gnosticism, which in differing forms is a perennial heresy. In the face of it they were determined to affirm creation's goodness and the corporate reality of the Church. This always provided some check upon the implicit dualism of the emphasis on radical transfer, and enabled some to see baptism as the culmination of a pilgrimage, others as its beginning.

2. The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages saw the division between East and West not least in the practices of Initiation. In the East, the various rites with water-baptism as their hinge were delegated to the local presbyters and administered as a unity, normally to infants, who were at once admitted to communion. In the West, the development referred to above was consolidated: infant baptism became universal, but required completion in an episcopal ceremony known as confirmation. This led to a theory which has had considerable prominence in our own time, e.g. in the writings of Anglicans such as A. J. Mason, Gregory Dix and L. S. Thornton, that Baptism is the washing away of sin and new birth, but confirmation, the laying on of a bishop's hands, is the gift of the Holy Spirit, essential to full Christian life and a prerequisite of the reception the Eucharist. The almost universal acceptance of infant baptism in both East and West is a phenomenon which demands some enquiry as to its causes. In the West the doctrine of original sin and the belief that unbaptised babies are consigned to hell was certainly powerful. This we must repudiate along with magical notions of baptismal grace. But we must not ignore the glorious hope of society redeemed, of the baptism of Europe – and the world – into the faith, of an all-embracing Christian culture. It is no exaggeration to claim the splendours of medieval Christendom as in some sense the fruit of infant baptism; and to complement the 'modern' evangelical emphasis on individual conversion and personal experience of Christ with the vision of the Holy Catholic Church.

3. The Reformation Churches

a) Luther

Luther at first rejoiced that God's mercy 'has preserved at least this one sacrament unspoiled and unspotted by man-made ordinances, and made it free to all races and classes of men', but he came to a somewhat uneasy position in his desire to stress both the objectivity of Divine Grace, the promise or word of God, and the need for faith in the person to be baptised. A profane priest may administer a valid baptism, but not in the absence of the impulse of faith in the recipient. Yet this could have made his retention of infant baptism an embarrassment. Can infants have faith?

Luther made much of the vicarious faith of those who present infants for baptism, and of the power of God's word and the prayers of a believing Church to infuse faith into the hearts of the ungodly and the unconscious. But in his **Greater Catechism**, he sails near to contradiction of what he has said elsewhere, yet may be thought by some to have resolved the dilemma rather nicely.

. . . it is not of the utmost importance whether he who is baptised has faith or not, for this will not make the baptism wrong: everything depends on God's word and command . . . For my faith does not make the baptism, but receives baptism . . . We bring the child in the belief and hope that it has faith, and pray God to give it faith; but we do not baptise it on this account, but solely because God has commanded it. (**Primary Works** ed. Wace and Buckheim (London 1896) pp.138ff.)

Luther poured scorn on Confirmation as episcopal ‘monkey play’ and a substitute for the work of grace in the heart; yet he was willing to retain it not as a Sacrament but as a solemn seal and blessing on the work of catechesis.

b) Calvin and the Reformed position

The focal theme of Calvinism is not predestination or election but union with Christ. For Calvin, baptism is:

1. The sign of our initiation into the Church, by which we are ‘engrafted in Christ’. (**Institutes**, ed. F. S. Battles, SCM Library of Christian Classics, p.1301).
2. A token and proof of cleansing and forgiveness. It is not simply ‘a token and mark by which we confess one religion before men’ (p.1304), but an efficacious sign of God’s grace, certifying and sealing to us the forgiveness promised in the Word.
3. Once and for all: ‘we must realise that at whatever time we are baptised, we are once and for all purged for an whole life’. (p.1305).
4. A participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the Christian dies to the old life and rises to the new.
5. A sign that we are ‘. . . so united to Christ himself that we become sharers in all his blessings.’
6. A public profession of faith before men.

Calvin argued in favour of infant baptism by citing the parallel with the old Covenant.

As Jewish infants were received into the Covenant Community by circumcision, so the children of Christians are rightly received into the Israel of the New Covenant by baptism. They are ‘engrafted into the body of the Church’. (p.1332).

He also adduced Christ’s blessing of the children. Since Christ invited and blessed little children, we should not exclude them from the sign, and the benefit, of baptism. ‘If the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them, why is the sign denied which, so to speak, opens to them a door into the Church . . .?’ (p.1330).

Baptism confirms to Christian parents that God’s promise and grace are not only to them, but to their children. God’s grace can work upon children, even before they reach years of understanding, as we see from John the Baptist’s being sanctified in his mother’s womb (Luke1:15). Christ himself was sanctified from earliest infancy, that he might sanctify those of every age.

‘. . . infants are baptised into future repentance and faith, and even though these have not yet been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secret working of the Spirit.’ Through nurture and instruction, the child grows into an understanding of his baptism.

Calvin abominated the medieval Roman rite of Confirmation, but believed that this had once existed in a purer form, and hoped to see restored some ceremony ‘in which the young are presented to God, after giving forth a confession of their faith’.

c) The Church of England

The English Reformers were unequivocally paedobaptist. Infant Baptism was for them the norm, and Cranmer inveighed against those who denied it. 'O what a gap these men open both to the Donatists and to the Anabaptists . . . the baptism of infants is proved by the plain scriptures'. Cranmer cites baptism as the equivalent under the new law of circumcision which was administered to infants, and Our Lord's attitude to children. 'Infants pertain to God'. This is the consistent testimony of the whole of the Bible. 'Your children are holy now'. (1 Cor. 7.14). The Book of Common Prayer ruthlessly prunes the excesses of Sarum and leaves no doubt that the rite with water is central and all-sufficient, and that Baptism may be a very simple ceremony indeed as when midwives and others administer it in emergency. But Cranmer preferred very much that it be performed by a fully-ordained and authorised minister, not to assert the priestly office but as a counter to superstition, and to affirm that it is a Sacrament of the Church. The Prayer Book, however, moves in uneasy oscillation between the affirmation of God's love for the child, and the damnable state of the old Adam. Its rite has an opening question to ensure that the child has not already been baptised. Episcopal confirmation was retained in the English Church, but the 1552 rite leaves it very open as to whether there is the sacramental imparting of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the Bishop's hands, – 'the prayer seems to be rather a prayer that may be said by any minister' (John Cosin) – while there is even greater stress on the need for the candidate to have had some rudimentary Christian education and to be able to say the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed.

There have always been those of a Catholic mind contending for the Anglican soul, and the influence of the Oxford Movement, especially, has sought to elevate confirmation and to find proof from the Fathers. 'If we are to assign a greater and less importance between the acts of the initiatory rite, while both are essential, the Fathers would say, confirmation has a greater dignity in that it conveys the specifically Christian gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore constitutes the true 'christening' of the Christian; and, in conclusion, the Fathers would have pointed to the Roman and Byzantine liturgies as embodying the common mind of Scripture and tradition upon this matter' (E.C. Ratcliff, **Liturgical Studies**, SPCK 1976, p.133). Such views, countered in G.W.H. Lampe's **The Seal of the Spirit** (2nd edn. SPCK 1967), seem somewhat to have lost their force in recent years.

Some mention should be made of the Anglican theologian, Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-72). His Wesleyan contemporary, J. H. Rigg, opposed his ideas, but he appealed to Methodists such as Hugh Price Hughes and John Scott Lidgett, not least for his universalism, which seemed a restatement of the Methodist belief that the Gospel is for **all**. Not only did he point out, as Calvin had said before him, that to deny infant baptism would be to make the new covenant narrower than the old, since the Jews circumcised baby boys, but he saw Christ as head of all mankind and Calvary as in some sense the world's baptism. He was powerfully aware of both its societal and 'mystical' dimensions.

d) **The Radical Reformation**

No survey, however rapid, of the history of Initiation can be complete without calling attention to the radical Christians who proliferated at the time of the Reformation and after the Civil Wars in England. Their longing for God and desire for immediacy of Communion made them often sacramentalists in the general sense, looking for symbols of the Divine, seeking unity with all creation, and fearful lest God be imprisoned in means and outward conformity be a substitute for the work of the Spirit. As George Fox said of the Lord's Supper 'it is a nearer and a further state to be in fellowship with (Christ) in his death than to take bread and wine in remembrance of his death'. Some Separatists and Pilgrim Fathers who believed strongly that the Sacraments could not be administered without an authorised Pastor found their hold on the ordinances weakening when deprived of them through lack of a Pastor, yet their faith did not waver nor their spiritual life decline. Thus Henry Barrow could say 'Sacraments are not a perpetual Mark of the Church'. What mattered was not water-baptism but baptism in the Spirit. John Bunyan is usually claimed as a Baptist, but he was in fact extremely 'open' as in his treatise 'Differences in Judgement about Water Baptism No Bar to Communion':

I do not plead for a despising of baptism, but bearing with our brother that cannot do with it for want of light . . . The best of baptism he hath . . . he is baptised by that one Spirit; he hath the heart of water baptism; the signification thereof; he wanteth only the outward show.

Such tolerance was not exceptional. It finds some echo as does the whole radical voice with regard to Sacraments in early Primitive Methodism. (See G. F. Nuttall 'Early Quakerism and Early Primitive Methodism'. **The Puritan Spirit** (1967) p.204ff.)

4. **The Traditions of Methodism**

Wesley defined a sacrament as 'an outward sign of inward grace and a means whereby we receive the same'. (**Fifty-three Sermons**, London 1771, p.208). He regarded sacraments as the ordinances of God but warned of the danger of mistaking 'the means for the end and to place religion rather in those outward works than in a heart renewed after the image of God'. (op.cit.206). As an Anglican Wesley practised infant baptism, but his thinking and teaching about it lacked clarity. He regarded it as unrepeatable, but had doubts in early years as to the validity of Dissenters' baptism.

'There is no doubt at all that Wesley believed in the Baptismal Regeneration of infants. 'What is implied in the being a son or a child of God, or having the Spirit of adoption? That these privileges, by the free mercy of God, are ordinarily annexed to Baptism (which is thence termed by our Lord . . . the being born of water and of the Spirit) we know.' We may suppose that in this passage he is referring to infants only, for in a later Sermon, in which he is more explicit on the subject, he says that in the case of adults baptism and the new birth are not the same thing – the external sign is certainly distinguishable, and is often separate, from the inward grace. But in regard to infants, in the same passage he continues: 'It is certain our Church supposes that all who are baptised in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole office for the Baptism of Infants proceeds upon this supposition. Nor is it

an objection of any weight against this, that we cannot comprehend how this work can be wrought in infants. For neither can we comprehend how is it wrought in a person of riper years!’ Lest we be tempted to think that Wesley did not hold this view very wholeheartedly himself, but felt himself forced to accept it on the authority of the Church, he sets out the full arguments for Infant Baptism as a means of regeneration, the washing away of Original Sin, admission into the New Covenant and into the Church, and inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, in a treatise published specifically for that purpose in 1756, and never retracted. Here he shows that, according to the intention of Jesus, there is no other means of entering the Church, or heaven, and the outward baptism is a necessary means to the inward. He argues that since infants are capable of entering into a covenant; since the infants of believers are included within the covenant of grace; since infants ought to come to Christ and enter His Church; since the Apostles baptised infants; therefore infants are proper subjects for baptism. And to the argument that faith and repentance are necessary before the new birth can take place, he answers that they were equally necessary before circumcision could be performed under the Old Covenant, and yet God ordered infants to be circumcised.’

(R.E. Davies, **History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain**, (Epworth Press 1965) I 160)

Wesley seems to have believed that infants were born again in baptism, but by their own folly, lost the grace of God given through it. Such people set up accursed things in the soul ‘which was once a temple of the Holy Ghost’ (op.cit.p.646). Elsewhere he writes, ‘Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore, ye must be born again’ (op.cit.p.247).

In his adaptation of the Order of Service for Infant Baptism, Wesley omitted the questions put to the godparents, and substituted no questions to the parents; it would seem that in his view, baptism should be administered without qualification as a divine gift.

Following Wesley, it would seem that the main streams of Methodism practised infant baptism as the norm.

The Primitive Methodists of 1860 and the United Methodist Free Church of 1867 sprinkled infants with water in the name of the Trinity. The Primitive Methodists prayed for the child ‘that he may receive the inward and spiritual grace symbolised by the outward and visible sign by being baptised with the Holy Spirit’. (Cf. **Primitive Methodist Service Book**, 1860, p.9. **United Methodist Free Church Service** 1867, pp.15-16.)

The Wesleyan Sunday Service Book (pre-1879) refers to the sprinkling or dipping of infants in the name of the Trinity and has a service for those ‘of riper years’ (pp. 69, 71).

The classic nineteenth century work of Wesleyan Systematic Theology is W.B. Pope’s three-volume **Compendium of Christian Doctrine** (Second Edition 1879). He is a strong upholder of Infant Baptism. The views that ‘none are to

be admitted to (Church) membership who do not give credible evidence of being regenerate . . . are altogether too narrow for the spirit of the catholic Gospel'. (III 321). 'The baptism of the children of believing parents is . . . a sign of the washing away of original guilt, and a seal of their adoption into the family of God; a sign of the regeneration which their nature needs and a seal of its impartation in God's good time' (op.cit.318). Pope implies that the blessings of Baptism are not indiscriminate, but reserved for the children of believers and he has no truck with a doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, 'which, as ordinarily accepted unevangelically links the sign and the thing signified' (op.cit.324).

The true doctrine . . . makes baptism the initiatory sign of a covenant the blessings of which it most aptly symbolises: the sprinkled blood and the Spirit poured out. It makes it also the seal of a covenant which pledges these blessings to all who believe and dedicate their children to Christ; a seal therefore of an impartation which is quite distinct from the seal, though it may accompany it, as it may have preceded it, and may also, as in part it must do so to unconscious infancy, follow the seal. Its importance therefore is great in its own order. To the adult, who received it in infancy, it remains a perpetual memory of a most solemn obligation; and to him who receives it as an adult it is a present encouragement to faith, and a pledge to his faith of present union with the Lord. To our children it is, when they come to know its responsibilities, a memorial of blessings provided for them before they were born. And on the congregation administering it by its appointed ministers to infants it enforces the necessity of taking all spiritual care of its little ones. (ibid.)

The Wesleyan revision of the Service in 1882, under the anti-Oxford movement polemic of J. H. Rigg, removed the Prayer Book's pessimism as to the state of nature and all implications that the child is born again in baptism.

Most subsequent liturgies before 1936 include services for both infants and adults (or those of riper years). Adult baptism is usually preceded by a renunciation of the world, the flesh and the devil, an affirmation of the credal faith and an expression of the personal desire for salvation in Jesus. Infant baptism in the Wesleyan services was by sprinkling, pouring or dipping. In the Primitive Methodist tradition water was sprinkled and such sprinkling was preceded by a prayer for the Holy Spirit to be given that the infant 'may be born again'. The United Methodists of 1913 made a distinction: 'We baptise with water; One only baptiseth with the Holy Ghost'.

Thus, before, as after, 1936, the norm was the practice of infant baptism despite differing beliefs about the sacramental meaning and significance, with services for Adults or for those of riper years available. Nowhere is the phrase 'believers' baptism' used.

Methodist scholarship supports the practice of infant baptism and justifies it on both scriptural and historical grounds.

A book by a Methodist scholar, which, known and used far outside Methodism, was regarded as definitive for many years, is W. F. Flemington, **The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism** (SPCK 1947). This argues that all the NT and early evidence points to the hypothesis that infant baptism began to be practised during the first century.

In his concluding chapter, Flemington places infant baptism strongly in the evangelical tradition. He writes: 'Infant baptism, so far from being less evangelical than believers' baptism is in reality more so, because it even more unmistakably embodies the primary truth of the Christian gospel, namely that the grace of God comes before everything else, and that man's only hope of salvation rests upon that Act of God in Jesus Christ, from which (as the chief writers of the New Testament so clearly and so unanimously demonstrate) this sacrament of the gospel draws all its meaning and efficacy' (op. cit. p. 146 f).

On the historical evidence and in every statement adopted by the Church since Methodist union, no doctrine, with the possible exception of the non-priestly nature of the ministry has been affirmed so unequivocally as Methodism's adherence to paedo-baptism. In 1936 a Memorandum solemnly declared:

We assert in common with the general body of the Church of Christ, that a solemn obligation to Christ, the Church and the child rests upon parents to present their children to Christ in Baptism, and thus to honour the ancient ordinance whereby they are joined to the visible community of Christ's people.

This was repeated in the **Statement on Holy Baptism** of 1952, and re-affirmed in the **Statement on Church Membership** in 1961. The 1952 **Statement** sums up its theological argument as follows:

The Methodist Church believes the Baptism of Infants to be in accordance with the mind of Christ. Not only is it sanctioned by the practice of the Church since very early times; it proclaims and offers the grace of God, who is eternally active for the salvation of all men, and receives even the youngest into that realm where His promises are gloriously fulfilled. Sin is not simply a matter of individual wrong-doing; each one of us is also involved in the sin of the world, in the community of evil. When an infant is baptised, he is received into the new Israel of God, which is God's answer to the community of evil.

This is in no sense contradicted by the preamble to the **Statement** which disclaims any intention of promulgating dogmatic definition or imposing on the Methodist people 'any one of the varying interpretations of the Sacrament of Baptism which have been held among us'.

A document presented to the 1975 Conference entitled **Ministers in Full Connexion and Baptism** set out ministerial responsibilities relating to baptism. It is clear that Methodist ministers 'are and ought to be expected to baptise infants'. Also, where a student or probationer is not willing to baptise infants, he should not be ordained into the ministry of our church. Moreover, 'our discipline and pastoral practice do not allow exceptions in the matter of Methodist ministers being willing to baptise infants'.

For parents who desired their children to be dedicated, the 1976 Conference declared that ministers were 'free to draw up and conduct services of Thanksgiving and Dedication without Baptism wherever they judge it to be advisable' but the production and distribution of a service of Thanksgiving and Dedication by the Faith and Order Committee was deemed 'not advisable at present'.

With regard to the pastoral problems relating to baptism, it was reaffirmed that 'no one shall be baptised who is known to have been baptised already' and that 'the practice of baptising as adults those who had already been baptised as infants was contrary to our practice and implied a view of baptism incompatible with our doctrines'. Appropriate means of the renewal of baptism were seen to be the laying on of hands, the Covenant Service and Holy Communion. Regarding any other means, 'the use of water as in baptism should be discouraged, even when the rite is stated not to be baptism'.

On the question of the relation of baptism to church membership, the 1961 Report on Church Membership reiterated the words of the 1952 statement on Baptism, that the Order of Service for the Baptism of Infants is a service of 'reception into the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church' and that 'when an infant is baptised, he is received into the new Israel of God'. The Report concludes that 'every child who is baptised with water in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, has been received at Baptism into the congregation of Christ's flock'. Since the second war there has been increased stress on 'preparation for full membership' of those baptised in infancy. The term 'confirmation' was added as an alternative title of the reception service in 1962 to give emphasis to prayer for the operation of the Holy Spirit as well as personal commitment.

Some Contemporary Christian Experience

1. The ferment of renewal

As we said at the outset, this in large part has necessitated our undertaking, but certain features require explicit mention.

Lesslie Newbigin in **The Household of God** (1952) treated Pentecostalism as a third major stream in Christendom and a manifestation of this is the contemporary charismatic movement (sometimes designated neo-pentecostalism) which has emerged amongst nearly all the historic denominations. Those involved in it claim to have had an experience similar to that of the first disciples on the day of Pentecost. The movement is world-wide and has found expression in a variety of ways, all of which are concerned with renewal.

- a) The most marked effect has been in personal renewal: a new reality to prayer life; a joyous, liberated approach to worship; the proliferation of new hymns and spiritual songs arising directly from experience and scripture; an awareness of the reality of Christ; an assurance of being accepted as God's sons and daughters and a release of the gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament.
- b) The movement has led to a desire to see the whole church renewed. Whilst, some, disillusioned with church structures, have left the mainstream to seek the ideal church based on scriptural principles, others have remained within their churches to work and pray for renewal there. As a result, some churches have been renewed in their life of worship, prayer, witness and fellowship. Such spontaneous renewal has run parallel with liturgical renewal, inspiring new forms of worship, lively and exuberant. Despite the divisions caused by the formation of House Churches, there has also been a trend towards church unity, ardent and zealous, running parallel with the ecumenical movement.

- c) There has been a renewed interest in social concern. In Brazil, for example, the church has been stirred to greater industrial undertakings in order to deal with unemployment. Here, political and social engagement go hand in hand with evangelism. In Italy, renewal has touched the deprived classes (fishermen, low-grade municipal employees, etc) and, although the pastors do not carry out any political activity, many of their followers have joined the Communist trade union and vote for the Communist Party. In Latin America in particular, renewal has both stimulated liberation theology and discovered its own theological expression within it. Liberation theology finds its paradigm in the exodus from Egypt and the passing of Israel through the Red Sea is the archetype of Christian baptism.

As was noted at the outset of this Report, a consequence of personal renewal has been for some a conviction that the appropriate way to affirm and seal what has happened is through this sacrament of baptism. Among these have been people already baptised as infants. Despite counselling to the effect that they should appropriate by faith the grace given in infant baptism, or that they should affirm their renewal through the eucharist or the covenant service, the rich symbolism of immersion – dying to self and rising to newness of life in Christ – has been the only means of satisfying the conscience. Therefore, because their own church has been unwilling to re-baptise, they have sought such re-baptism elsewhere in the belief that they are doing this in obedience to Christ.

2. Ecumenical Perspectives

There is a weight of material due to the immediacy and complexities of the subject and the valuable investigations being carried out by the British Council of Churches. It is impossible to do more than indicate briefly the present policies of the mainstream denominations and the questions being asked.

(a) Other Denominational Practices

The Roman Catholic Church

In the Roman Church, the total act of initiation is 'reception into full communion with the Catholic Church through baptism, confirmation and admission to Holy Communion'. It is believed that this unites a person to Christ so that he becomes one with him in his love for the Father and for all mankind. In this union, through which is forgiveness and sanctification, the redemption of the individual lies. He becomes one with Christ in mind and will and also in action – eucharistic and apostolic.

Initiation normally takes place in and through the local church, which has been defined as 'a section of the people of God entrusted to a bishop, to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the gospel and the eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active'.

Baptism is usually administered in infancy. Admission to the communion has usually been at the age of seven, and confirmation is now often postponed until adolescence, when it follows a course of preparation which is also the case with adults who have 'become believers'. A new rite of 'Christian initiation for

adults' has been extant since 1972. This provides guidelines for a restored catechumenate of reception by stages.

If a convert has been baptised already, and can produce evidence of the fact, there is no re-baptism. If there is doubt or uncertainty, there will be private administration of **conditional** baptism, for which the formula is 'if you are not baptised, I baptise you in the name . . .' There will be private confession with absolution from the priest, though if baptism is conferred absolutely, there is no confession, because baptism of itself wipes away sin. If baptism is conferred conditionally, absolution in the sacrament of penance is correspondingly conditional.

Full baptism and confirmation have essential and invariable formulae. Baptism is with water in the name of the Trinity. It is administered by a priest. Confirmation is by the imposition of hands and the words 'N be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit'. This is usually administered by a bishop, though he has powers of delegation. Chrism – the holy oil of priesthood – is administered in both rites – immediately after baptism; concurrently with the imposition of hands in confirmation. In baptism, a member of the local Christian community, who must be a Catholic, stands as sponsor.

All the baptised are 'full members' of the Church according to their capacity. There is no distinction between children and adults, though clearly they cannot be expected to do the same things or fulfil the same demands. Church membership is the living of the baptismal life through its supreme expression in the eucharist, but also through the extension of the sacraments into many obligations and duties, which are carefully defined. Baptismal vows are renewed verbally and by the ceremony of **Asperges** usually associated with the Easter ceremonies. The priest walks among those reaffirming their promises and sprinkles them, often with a palm branch dipped in water.

Church of England

Infant baptism is the norm in the Book of Common Prayer, but in the Alternative Service Book of the Church of England the adult rite is now placed first. It is increasingly realised that a dual practice is acceptable, and indeed inevitable. But there is no sense in which infant baptism is invalid or that baptism itself can be repeated.

There is now a greater emphasis on the fact that baptism is admission to the Church, and must have its setting in the Christian community. It should be administered at the parish eucharist. Private baptisms are now in many instances discouraged. It is always administered with water, and in the name of the Trinity.

The 1966 report of the Liturgical Commission, **Baptism and Confirmation**, described three possible views as to the relation between baptism and confirmation.

The first view is: Baptism in water is the sacramental means by which the Spirit is given to Christians. Confirmation is the occasion in which Christians renew the acts of repentance and faith which were made in their name, or which they themselves made, at their baptism. They do this in the presence of the bishop who solemnly blesses them; and this blessing may be regarded as an occasion of grace.

The second view is: Baptism in water is the sacramental means by which the Spirit is given to Christians. Confirmation is a second sacramental act, consisting of prayer for the coming of the Spirit with the laying on of hands upon those upon whom the Spirit is asked to come. It effects a further work of the Spirit, to assist them against temptation.

The third view is: Baptism in water and prayer with the laying on of hands together constitute the sacramental means by which the Spirit is given to Christians. If the two sacramental acts are distinguished in thought or separated in practice, the Spirit is thought to come in baptism to effect cleansing from sin and the new birth and in confirmation to complete the divine indwelling.

Because anointing is frequently associated with the Spirit in the scriptures, it is restored as an optional practice in the initiation rite of the Alternative Service Book.

There is awareness of the fact that confirmation may be misunderstood as 'completion'. It should rather be a stage in the process of Christian growth. In many places admission of young people to communion before confirmation is being tried as an experiment.

Reformed Churches

- (i) **The Church of Scotland** remains vigorously and unequivocally paedobaptist. Baptism belongs only within the life of the Church, where it accompanies and seals the preaching of the gospel. Infant baptism is believed to be wholly scriptural. Evidence for it is found in the baptism of households, but even more in the nature of the scripture message – the covenant with Abraham and his seed, fulfilled and perfected in the new covenant in Jesus Christ. The early church baptised women, thus being more inclusive than the old covenant, which confined circumcision to males. But it is inconceivable that it would be narrower than the old covenant in excluding children, especially since, under the gospel, we are all as little children, recipients of the free grace of God.

'Baptism does not arise out of any work of ours, but is baptism into the work of Christ on our behalf, and must be linked with the practice of the word which tells of that divine work. It is not offered to us as the vindication of anything we have done, or as an expression of anything we have done, or an approval of anything we have done or promised. None of these is the thing signified by the sign. What is signified is what God has done, does and will do. On this alone can human lives be grounded.'

'In Reformed language, baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, not a badge of our decision or conversion, important as these are.'

Baptism is unrepeatable because Christ's saving work is once for all and completed, and by baptism he applies this finished work to us specifically by uniting us with himself and incorporating us in his body. It is as impossible to repeat baptism as to repeat the individual's human birth. It is as unique as birth – or death.

Confirmation, at an age when a person is able to answer for himself, is confirmation of baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper. It demands confession of faith and is administered as the minister, the presbyter, either raises his hand in blessing or lays a hand on each head. The hand of welcome into the Church may also be offered.

In the mid seventies the Church of Scotland was experiencing increasing controversy over the question of second baptism, involving elders and ministers as well as lay people. This came to a head in 1974-76 at the bar of the General Assembly, as a result of which the Assembly reaffirmed the traditional 'One baptism for the remission of sins' and subsequently measures were taken to deal with those in breach of the 1963 Act Anent Baptism. In the case of ministers and elders the alternatives were recantation by affirmation of the Act, or resignation.

(ii) **The United Reformed Church**

Initiation is by baptism and confirmation. Baptism should normally be administered in the presence of the congregation and be brought into close relation with the prayers of the faithful, the offertory and, when the eucharist is celebrated, communion. It is administered with water in the name of the Trinity. Infant baptism precedes believers' baptism in the United Reformed Service Book. In the case of someone who is able to make a profession of faith, baptism and confirmation are to be seen as two parts of a whole act. Confirmation takes place by the minister laying his hand on the head of each of the candidates in turn, or raising his hand in blessing over each, beginning with those who have just been baptised.

There is a clear understanding that baptism is once for all and therefore 're-baptism' is not condoned.

Baptism includes a stress on the covenant relationship of God and His people – 'the promise is to you and to your children . . .' Godparents are optional. With the unification of Churches of Christ with the URC, there are now parallel forms of Christian initiation. The Churches of Christ practise believers' baptism. The URC denomination now has a wide variety of practice including thanksgiving for the birth of a child, infant dedication, infant baptism and believers' baptism.

In its **Guidelines on Baptism** it is stated that 'nothing should be done in conformity with one practice that casts doubt on the integrity of the other' and that 'no-one shall be required to administer a form or mode of baptism to which he has a conscientious objection.'

All who are baptised are 'members of the Church'. The majority would probably describe a church member as someone who has been baptised and confirmed into membership of the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, and received as such in a particular local congregation by Church Meeting, their name being entered on the Roll of Members of that congregation. This does not normally happen to children, so an effective distinction is made between those who are members by baptism and those entitled to vote at Church Meeting or be eligible for the eldership. Some churches have had a category of junior member, usually 13-16 year olds, who are confirmed but cannot vote at Church Meeting. This is tending to die out. The question of whether or not baptised children

should receive communion is under discussion in several congregations but as yet there is no agreed denominational stance.

Initiation means sharing in the life of the Church within the local church. This gives entry to the life of the Church throughout the world and indeed to the communion of saints which has fellowship with the church triumphant.

The Baptist Church

(a) The act of admission to full membership of the church is usually referred to as 'believers' baptism' or 'admission to membership by believers' baptism'.

(b) There is no prescribed Order of Service or form of words which are always used. There is always a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In some churches this is prefaced by a personal testimony describing the events leading to conversion. After a confession of faith the candidate is baptised by immersion in the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In some churches the minister (and deacon/elder) may lay hands upon the candidate before the Communion of the Lord's Supper which follows the baptism although this is far from normal practice. The right hand of fellowship into the Church is given by the minister which takes the form of shaking of the hand and normally a certificate of baptism and church membership is given.

(c) There are no essential words apart from the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The essential act is that of immersion in water.

(d) The act of baptism is normally carried out by the minister of the church but another person may be authorised by the church to conduct the baptism. Some churches appoint a mature Christian to act as 'sponsor' for the new believer who will act as guide and encourager both before baptism and for a period after it.

It must not be forgotten that Baptist churches are divided into two categories (1) closed membership churches, which by trust deed, and therefore church rules, may receive into membership only those who have been baptised as believers by immersion; (2) open membership churches practice believer's baptism as the normal mode of entry into the church, but welcome members of other churches by letter of transfer or some other form of commendation.

The closed Baptist churches may have a rule of associate membership, whereby members will be welcomed to the Lord's Table even if they have not been baptised. In the open churches, there is an open Table.

The service of dedication for the children of Christian parents has been found to create difficulties and confusions and is much better seen as a service of thanksgiving. This both the Church of England and the Methodist Church may be inclined to adopt at a time when fewer people may be baptised in infancy. There is a certain amount of theological discussion in the Baptist churches as to whether the paedo-Baptism and believer's baptism patterns of initiation may not properly co-exist. The Baptist churches remain adamant that the New Testament evidence for infant baptism is scanty indeed, and that its profound significance is for believers, but it has been maintained that New Testament theology allows both for vicarious faith and the reality of a child's faith, while a psychological approach argues that both forms of baptism testify to different truths for the individual's development from childhood on. It has also been argued that the two different patterns of baptism arose in church history through

mal-administration. If the oneness of baptism could be reaffirmed, this might be important both for Christian renewal and reunion.

Our chief concern is with the Churches in the main Catholic and Reformed tradition but it is interesting to note that the Seventh-Day Adventists practice Baptism on profession of faith, performed by an ordained minister. Quakers, on the other hand, observe no Sacraments and admit as members those who feel at one with Friends and wish to join, and who are discerned by appointed visitors to be humble learners in the school of Christ with their faces set towards the light.

(b) Local Ecumenical Projects

In general all Churches recognise each others' baptisms as being into the universal Church. (Strict Baptists do not but they do not engage in ecumenical projects.)

The problem is likely to arise over Confirmation. Many projects have joint confirmation as an essential element; and this is confirmation of membership in the universal Church. Anglicans insist on the laying of **episcopal** hands and so the authorised service provides for the appropriate Methodist or Free Church minister to share in this. This gives joint communicant membership. The problem arises when those thus confirmed leave the project. They then have to opt for membership of one Church, though without losing the joint membership. The joint confirmations are experienced as expressions of Christian unity and solemn commissioning for witness and service in the world.

(c) Thoughts from Abroad

(i) Whilst the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand affirms, with paedobaptist churches world-wide that baptism is unrepeatable it has come to the view that it is renewable. The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand recognised that there was a 'felt need for significant services for times of personal renewal and dedication for service'. Its Doctrinal Commission recommended two services of renewal; 'A service of Renewal and Discipleship' and 'A service of Renewal – Appropriating Baptism' which included immersion. At each of these services it is recommended that a Statement of Intention is read. The statement is an explanation that whilst for some members the call to Christian discipleship 'has been renewed in a deep and satisfying way'; for others the service provides 'the opportunity for renewal and rededication, which will it is hoped revive and increase the grace of their Baptism and Confirmation'.

(ii) The Methodist Church of Southern Africa held a seminar on Baptism in 1983, because it is confronted by precisely the issues in which we are engaged. The resulting memorandum was presented to the Conference which referred it to the Doctrinal Commission. The Assistant General Missionary Secretary opines that 'we have only just begun a long debate of great significance for the whole Methodist Church'. Some maintain that this is solely a 'white issue', since most of the black churches are completely committed to infant baptism, but he does not agree.

(d) **The British Council of Churches**

As a somewhat delayed result of a Consultation in 1979, the BCC has appointed a group 'to examine with urgency and with a concern for practical ecumenism the theology and practice of Christian initiation and church membership'. The 1979 Consultation included a paper by Dr David Thompson, then of the Churches of Christ, which interestingly widened the discussion to point the interaction between baptismal practice and social and political factors. He concluded by raising two questions for our time:

- (i) In an age which has seen **both** the strengthening of the nuclear family unit as a norm of social life and an unparalleled sentimentalising of family relationships, **and** an increasing break up of family life by divorce rather than by death of partners, how do we keep alive as a real option the infant baptism ideal of nurture in a Christian family?
- (ii) In an age which has seen a new degree of geographical mobility, how do we keep alive as a real option the idea of the church as a nurturing community for those baptised either as infants or adults? In what sense is the local church a community today? How can we avoid the retreat into privatised religious experience?

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

1. Factors to be taken into account in the present situation

- a) The exploration of how we express moments of significance in our pilgrimage of faith has been greatly enriched by the bringing together of theological, psychological and sociological insights in contemporary Christian experience. This has shown itself in all of the arts, especially drama, and it has been greatly assisted by the fast-developing media of communication. The Christian faith which we seek to express is world-embracing and life-affirming even though it may demand renunciation, and does not ignore the gravity of sin. In its expression we need to involve every part of our personality, with all our God-given senses, and with the elements of thought, feeling and will informing and strengthening each other. And we need to bring to it all our relationships with the world, with each other, and with the gifts of creation by which our life is sustained and enriched. Wholeness of life may not always be our conscious aim in such expressions of faith as our acts of worship, but it is increasingly seen to be potentially one of its most valuable consequences.
- b) The liturgical movement, and the greater frequency of sacramental worship in many parts of the Church has made possible a greater sense of continuity with the Christian past, a 'convergence' of separated Christians, as in the Lima Document, **Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry**, and an experience of the wholeness of life in worship.
- c) The ferment of renewal being experienced across the Christian tradition is affirming the vivid reality of personal experience in the life of faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. Such life-changing experience needs to be personally expressed and corporately shared in ways which are felt to be more appropriate than existing forms allow. Wholeness of life requires our worship to

be sufficiently varied to give imaginative expression to the things of chief concern and value to us all.

- d) These three movements – cultural, liturgical, personal – often thought of in separation from each other, are in fact intimately related. They all point to the need to integrate as closely as possible our expressions of faith with the context of creation, our human nature, inheritance and relationships, and the experiences of God’s grace appropriate to our various situations and stages of development.
- e) We are encouraged in this approach by the attitudes, words and actions of Jesus. He repeatedly expressed appreciation of the works of nature and of human minds and hands. He made imaginative use of the senses of touch, taste, sight, sound and smell, as well as of the elements of earth, air, fire, water, bread and wine. And he was readily responsive to the concerns and needs of different people through whatever words, actions, and elements seemed most appropriate to the meanings which he desired to express.
- f) The endeavour to integrate words, elements and actions with the gospel of Christ, and with our various situations, may help us to assess some present strengths and weaknesses in our practice of Christian initiation – and thus indicate the most creative way ahead.

2. Strengths and weaknesses in present attitudes and practices

- a) Affirmation of the priority of God’s love, to which our faith and love are a response, is one of the most powerful emphases made in connection with baptism, and particularly with infant baptism. But is not powerfully expressed in the wording of the liturgy. This points to the need for a closer match between affirmations made about and the words used in the rite of baptism.
- b) Thankfulness for the gift of this particular life, for the renewal of our personal and corporate life implied in it and for the wonder of creation and re-creation are responses which are deeply felt. It is clearly desirable that they should be fittingly expressed. The preoccupation with original sin in the Western rites has sometimes excluded these, and although it also expresses the need sometimes felt for cleansing and totally new life, it should be held in tension with natural (and Christian) joy.
- c) The element of water brings with it age-long and powerful associations. It suggests cleansing, refreshment and renewal of life. Water is a gift, not secured by our own exertions. It may also relate at a deeper level in our consciousness to the waters of the womb, the analogy of ‘birth from above’. These meanings are made more specific by association with John the Baptist (repentance and affirmation of faith), Jesus and the other John (the gift of the Holy Spirit, vocation, and enablement), and Paul (sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the fruits of his risen life). These are tremendous meanings which are not in the remotest way indicated by a drop of water in a saucer at the bottom of a removable font the shape and size of a domestic vase. This points to the need for a much closer correspondence between the meanings affirmed and the elements and actions by which they are expressed.
- d) Some element of commitment is called for in baptism. But commitment has many aspects – the dedication of a child to God; the affirmation of a faith; the making of promises; the offering of oneself in support; the dedication of oneself personally or corporately to God. These are all different from each other, and

distinctions should be more clearly made. We might then be better able to see what is the relative necessity or importance of each, and whether some elements missing in the past are now thought to be essential or whether some which have been insisted upon in the past are now thought to be less essential. For instance, are the promises of parents – or godparents – required to make valid the rite of infant baptism? The tradition would say emphatically ‘No!’ Yet many have felt the parents’ promise to be vital to the rite, and an opening rubric of the Wesleyan Service of 1883 virtually says this.

- e) If eschatological transfer to new life in Christ is seen in the NT and Fathers as a principal meaning of baptism, there are other associated meanings which relate the sacrament to creation as well as redemption, the use of water and incorporation into the human community. Naming is increasingly being seen as an important act of differentiation, recognition, and pronouncement of a new being in Christ – hence the Christian name – as is the introduction to the wider community and the making of new, reciprocal relationships between them. Their importance suggests that we should find words and actions which express them more fully.
- f) Confirmation makes possible to each person a publicly shared affirmation of faith and pledge of loyalty, and a corresponding affirmation by the church about the standing of that person in the community of faith. Reference to it as reception into membership makes unclear its relationship to baptism; how can we be received into membership through confirmation if we are already members through baptism? And the word ‘confirmation’ (‘completion’ rather than ‘strengthening’) suggests the end of a process rather than a new beginning – which may be why it is so often acted upon as such.
- g) Our concept of membership is suffering from a confusion of meaning. Is it a pastoral tool to make sure people are cared for? If so, does not this make the church too inward-looking, and would not the community roll be more appropriate? Does it state who is a voting member of this particular ecclesiastical organisation, and therefore called upon to exercise responsibility, and be eligible for office? If so, would not an ‘electoral roll’ be more effective and less theologically confusing? Is it a financial device for allotting assessments? If so, would not average attendance figures be more to the point? Such distinction might free our concept of membership from the non-theological factors and enable us to say what membership is, when it begins, how it should be acted upon from the moment it begins, and, above all, of what is one made a member?

3. Relating Christian Initiation to Rites of Passage and Renewal

- a) Similar questions must be asked of Christian initiation. Into what is a person initiated? The family of God? The Christian Church? The Christian faith? The voting membership of this particular ecclesiastical set-up? Or, mystically, into Christ himself as in some sense more than these, our righteousness in heaven, the very life of God? Are these all the same, or are they different? Does initiation take place into all of these at once? If so, how and when? Or does it take place into different things, in different ways, at different times? If so, how and when? Or does initiation cover the whole process – in which case, no one act or moment can be said to constitute initiation in separation from all the others?

- b) Fresh consideration of the rites of passage encourages us to take seriously the various stages of transition in our development and to find in them a fresh clue to a rite or rites of Christian initiation. Chief among the stages of transition are birth, recognition and incorporation into the community, preparation for and affirmation of personal loyalty and responsibility, and commissioning by the community for a specific status, office or task and death. Rites of passage are most effective when they not only recognise or celebrate a stage of transition, but when they also bring about an existential change appropriate to that stage.
- c) Experiences of insight, refreshment or renewal are also of significance to us, and a full and rich corporate life will wish to take account of them and celebrate them. They do not of themselves signify a stage of transition and they do not bring about an existential change, but they do affect the depth and vividness with which both are experienced and shared.
- d) It follows that initiation is into different things at different stages; that initiation into the same thing cannot be repeated without making a nonsense out of one or other event; that renewal can and should be repeatedly celebrated; and that the forms we use should clarify the meaning of each event, should relate to it and the appropriate Christian meaning, and should express both through an imaginative integration of words, elements and actions.

4. Rites of Passage

- a) Baptism which is a Sacrament of the Gospel and is both the sign of God's grace in Christ and of incorporation in him through the community of the Church. The essential element is water applied by pouring, sprinkling or immersion in the name of the Trinity. There must be emphasis on the new life in Christ which is different from that given by human birth, and also reception 'into the congregation of Christ's flock'. Membership of the Church begins at once.
- b) There may also be a rite of personal response, or initiation into Christian discipleship. This will succeed Baptism – perhaps after an interval of several years, though in the case of those baptised in youth or adulthood it might be part of one ceremony. Its heart will be the acceptance of Christ's call to follow him. It might also include mutual foot-washing. It will mean commitment to a course of training and a rule of life.
- c) In addition a rite of commissioning should be considered for those who wish to share directly in the Church's ministry. This is not the same as Ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, but it would mean dedication to the service of the local church in some specific role or office.
- d) Prior to Baptism there might be some rite for the newborn child, both of thanksgiving and of celebration. This must not be confused with Baptism and may well be most appropriate when parents wish to defer the Sacrament until the child is able to answer for himself. It could cause problems for the parents of handicapped children. But it should be considered whether the Church provides sufficient opportunities to express sheer joy in creation. Perhaps something of this should preface the rite of baptism itself.

5. Rites of Renewal

- a) Holy Communion recapitulates the drama of creation and redemption through the work of God in Christ, reconstitutes the crisis of the Church's origins, and seals for us the benefits of the new covenant. It is intended for frequent repetition (many traditions – and the Lima document – say that it should be celebrated at least every Lord's Day) and it should be regarded as the principal and perpetual rite of renewal.
- b) The Covenant Service is designed to take place at the dying of the old year and the birth of the new. It is the annual rite of renewal, emphasising our dedication in response to God's unfailing love and faithfulness.
- c) Special rites need to be devised.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1) **In common with the whole of the Church, Catholic and Reformed, and in faithfulness to our interpretation of the New Testament, the Methodist Church affirms that Baptism in the name of the Trinity is unrepeatable.**

To countenance re-baptism is seriously to undermine that very radical 'once for all' nature of the sacrament which has stimulated the demand for it in later life. Infant baptism, if done with the right intention, forms, words and prayers, can never be invalid. If from the Church's point of view, and from that of serious Christianity, parents have brought their children to the font with little understanding or resolve to implement the vows, those children should not despise the instinctive love, albeit mixed with folk religion, which craved this ceremony for them, and, like Luther, they should find strength and comfort from the knowledge 'I have been baptised'. Christianity is deliverance through a work not our own, something done for us.

Augustine wrote of someone he knew, inclined at first to be sceptical of the relevance of the Church and its ceremonies to Christian faith, but who, in the end, was 'delivered from being ashamed of the Sacraments of the humility of God's word' (**Confessions** viii 2). In baptism, although we are exalted to the heights of Christ's eternal triumph, we also share the humility of him who was himself baptised in a crowd of sinners in Jordan, and in the blood and shame of the cross. And even if it was but a social convention or superstition subscribed to without our knowledge or consent we ought not to deny that it is a means of grace through which God acts.

- (2) **The Methodist Church re-affirms its historic conviction that Infant Baptism is in accord with the Gospel and strongly upholds its validity.**

Infant baptism is a sign of prevenient grace, that 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' and that God loves us before ever we know him. He loves the whole of humanity. And he is concerned not only to bring individuals to the knowledge of his truth, but to redeem the race of which they are members and with which they are inextricably bound up. The promise is 'to you and to your children and to all that are afar off'. (Acts 2:39). Infant baptism proclaims that God's mercy is for all, in spite of weakness, helplessness and sin, and that 'as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (I Cor. 15:22). Even those who will always remain mentally and physically infants, who will never

be able to make a personal profession of faith are not outside the covenant of Grace.

This does not mean that the present practice of infant baptism is necessarily as it should be. It should be no private ceremony but a great and dramatic act of the Church, an act of renewal for the whole congregation, a means by which its members 'improve' their baptisms. It is no longer practicable to have all baptisms at Easter as in the early Church, but thought should be given to instituting 'baptismal Sundays' like the old Scottish Communion Sundays. This may at first conflict with the 'folk religious' aspect of baptism, which we ought not wholly to disallow because it is of importance for family life which the Church should foster; but the obstacles here will not prove insuperable after a time.

Serious conversations should take place with the parents so that they realise the solemnity of the ordinance for themselves as well as for their child and the responsibility they take upon themselves in making the Baptismal vows. Groups of parents may be brought to Church on several Sunday afternoons in advance of the baptism, for an informal course of instruction over tea. This should be continued afterwards. Cyril of Jerusalem (c.350) reserved his profoundest teaching on baptism until the rite had been experienced. The Church people should be involved in the whole process as well as the minister. The evangelical opportunities at every stage should not be neglected.

As a consequence of so thoroughgoing a policy some parents may withdraw or postpone or refuse baptism for their children. This should be accepted when done out of understanding and conviction, though not actively encouraged. The Conference Memorandum of 1936 declared that 'a solemn obligation to Christ, the Church and the child rests upon parents to present their child to Christ in Baptism' (see above). This should not be forgotten, though we have to recognise a demand for liberty of conscience, more clamant now than then. It may be necessary to find ways of advocating infant baptism which use the language of theological appropriateness and evangelistic opportunity rather than 'obligation'. It should also be borne in mind that many parents are not theologically articulate and may not easily express the deep feelings of their hearts in the language of impeccable doctrinal formulation, or of evangelical experience.

(3) The Methodist Church recognises that not all Methodists are able to share this conviction and that in such cases it must continue to allow for postponed Baptism

This may increasingly become the practice in a climate in which conformist Christianity no longer flourishes as once it did. There will be fewer Christian homes and more children may be denied knowledge of Christ until they encounter the Church in their 'teens or later. There may also be more parents who, in spite of the traditional Methodist teaching, feel strongly that baptism must be left until their child comes to understanding and a conscious and decided faith. This would seem also to be a position which can be justified from the New Testament. There must be no suggestion either on one side or the other that the difference is between first and second class Christians. 'Evangelical conversion', a personal sense of God's forgiveness and the wholehearted acceptance of Christ may follow baptism whether infant or believers'. An

increased measure of faith may be granted, and not once nor twice, in after years.

(4) The possibility of devising new and additional rites should be considered

(i) There is a Methodist service of **Thanksgiving of parents after the Birth of a Child** comparable to that in the Church of England **Alternative Service Book** (1980) p.213ff. This should be available for use when baptism is deferred; or perhaps used as the first act of the Sacrament itself to stress the joy of God's gift of life.

(ii) A rite to celebrate evangelical conversion or renewal. The Eucharist is, of course, the best and dominical means of this, and Methodists have the Covenant Service, while Confirmation could be the appropriate rite. But we would echo the wish of a recent paper from a working party of Church of England, Methodist, United Reformed and Baptist Union Evangelicals: 'May we all be challenged to think through a ceremony that could truly meet the needs of (those who ask for what may seem in the eyes of the Church to be second baptism) yet respect the theological and liturgical scruples of both infant baptisers and believers' baptisers'.

This should not include any use of water which might confuse the rite with baptism. The accompanying Scripture passages and prayers will be all-important. Foot-washing, which J. H. Moulton called 'a neglected sacrament', may be considered; anointing is a possibility; Asperges may not seem quite of the Methodist ethos nor be sufficiently personal for the purpose, though it may be experienced in ecumenical projects.

(iii) Confirmation has a confused history and, in the Church of England, as is noted above, different interpretations. But it has established itself both in Methodism and in ecumenical projects. It is important that it does not 'imperil' Baptism by dividing it 'into two moments of salvation' to quote T. F. Torrance, either by injuring its completeness in its once-for-all character, or by anticipating its fulfilment in the consummated Kingdom. But it may have continuing value as an opportunity for the profession of faith and the invocation of the Holy Spirit at the dawn of adulthood, while it could well be delivered from being a mere social custom and – as sometimes – an end, not of the ceremonies of initiation, but of any Church involvement at all, by being upheld as a service of commissioning for the ministry of the whole people of God.

Two related questions concern admission to Holy Communion and the whole meaning of Church membership. Reports presented to the Conferences of 1973 and 1975 on 'Children and the Sacrament of Holy Communion' did not recommend any constitutional action. The three different points of view examined then still pertain. In our working party, procedures to admit children and to prepare them were described and there was much sympathy for the widely-held conviction that baptised children should not be excluded from the Lord's Table, though it was recognised that they must show some serious desire and be prepared by the minister in conjunction with the appropriate youth leaders and with the consent of the parents concerned. Nor must the Eucharist be in danger of being 'put away' with childish things. As the previous report stated, much here must be left to the discretion of ministers, parents, children and local churches. What we would emphasise is that Baptism is the one essential rite for entry into the Church and those who have received it are

entitled to their place at the Lord's Table, though it may be expedient for this to be delayed. We would not advocate communicating babes in arms as in the Orthodox Churches.

(5) There must be a sensitive regard to the position of Ministers

The re-affirmation of both infant baptism and that of those able to answer for themselves may strain the consciences of some ministers. It has been suggested that the solution of the problem in the United Reformed Church furnishes a precedent, but the parallel is far from exact since there the problem arose from the merger of two denominations, and in any case the Churches do not form a connexion. A dual system would seem to be a pre-requisite in many ecumenical projects and in the 'coming great Church' to which we look, but it is hard to see any place in the Methodist ministry for one unable to baptise infants. It needs to be ascertained at candidature whether a person is willing to accept the affirmations of this report, just as it should be ensured that if a male, he agrees with the Methodist Church on the ordination of women to the full ministry of Word and Sacraments.

Even so, consciences may become inflamed as ministry is exercised and convictions may change. This has already happened with painful consequences, though it must be admitted that discontent with baptismal policy has sometimes been symptomatic of an individual dis-ease with Methodist doctrine and practice as a whole.

In such cases the matter should be regarded in the first instance as one of pastoral concern. We recommend for this purpose the formation of a pastoral committee by the Chairman of the District, if the need arises. But where convictions have become irrevocably Baptist rather than Methodist, everything should be done to ease the transfer of such a minister with understanding and goodwill as appropriate to a pastoral rather than a disciplinary matter. Discipline would thus only need to be involved if and when all these approaches had been explored without success.

No less sensitivity is needed within the Church with regard to the convictions of two other groups of ministers – those whose practice is sometimes stigmatised as either 'rigorist' or 'indiscriminate'. The so-called 'rigorists' emphasise the responsibilities imposed by baptism on those to be baptised or the parents of infant candidates, and are concerned lest the Church implicate itself, parents presenting children, or candidates in hypocrisy. The so-called 'indiscriminators' regard the gift made in baptism as primarily unconditional, and the associated promises at present usual in our practice as secondary, and believe that our Arminian theology commits us to seeing all humanity as heirs of the salvation brought by Christ, the new Adam. Both schools of thought are concerned about the place of baptism in our missionary strategy. The 'rigorists' perceive the dangers attending the reduction of baptism to the level of 'folk religion'. The 'indiscriminators' are more hopeful about the role of 'folk religion' and 'conventional Christianity' in God's plan of salvation; they believe that even the residual Christianity left now in British social custom can be a foothold for the Gospel, and they fear that every refusal to baptise marks a further de-Christianisation of British society. Both groups of ministers are aware of the possibility that the Holy Spirit can, after years of neglect, revive spiritual life, and restore the meaning and value of baptism.

To the question of **emergency baptisms**, which has recently, as so often before, exercised the consciences of ministers and members of our Church, we must reiterate our Church's previous judgement (e.g. Methodist Conference 1959, Representative Session Agenda, p.241) that a person (of any age) validly baptised, even with the minimum conditions, may not be baptised again. It is possible and much to be commended, that the 'omitted ceremonies' be supplied, if the candidate lives on, in a public service, 'presenting the child to the congregation and including the vows which form part of the Baptismal Service', should be held.

The minimum conditions are ecumenically agreed to be these: that water be applied to the candidate (by pouring, dipping or sprinkling), by any person acting with the intention of doing what Christ willed or what Christians do, and saying 'I baptise you' (or, 'N, the servant of God is baptised') 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (in whatever language the person baptising understands).

Our Church has a responsibility to reassure families and medical personnel that the omission of baptism does not, in our judgement, prejudice a baby's relationship to God; but it is equally important for pastoral reasons to understand the need that (e.g.) some hospital staffs feel to be sure that they have discharged their responsibility for the whole welfare of each patient, and that in their concern for their patients they may be acting, no less truly than a congregation or a family, as a community of faith.

Epilogue

'The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered'.

So the Westminster Confession, on which Donald Baillie commented 'The point is that a person's baptism should be to him a means of grace, not merely at that moment but ever afterwards; and the faith which appropriates the grace offered in the sacrament includes the faith by which all his life long he looks back to his baptism'. (**The Theology of the Sacraments** p.88).

Bernard Holland, in the Fernley-Hartley lecture for 1970, urged a similar lesson on Methodism, which he complained, had sadly ignored it.

'Baptism, with its message of our call to be children of God, and of his unending love, can speak to us in all conditions of the soul, through every ordinance of the Church, and throughout life. It has a word to say to us when in sin we run away from God, when in conversion we turn back to him, and when in despondency and grief we lose faith in him. Nor are its implications ever exhausted . . . until it has spoken its last and most gracious word of re-assurance at the hour of our death'. (**Baptism in Early Methodism** p.150).

Baptism commits the Christian to a discipline of prayer, of fidelity to the other means of grace, especially worship in the congregation, and association with God's people for mutual support and growth in understanding, and for corporate action in the world to relieve distress and to offer Christ in manifold ways. To regard all this as the extension of baptism roots all our Christian lives in the finished work of Christ. It reminds us that we are no longer our own, but, as the Heidelberg

Catechism has it, 'with body and soul both in life and in death' belong to our 'faithful Saviour Jesus Christ', and even as in the Holy Eucharist we are brought to a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, so in the end we shall be led to its consummation in eternal joy. But at the moment of baptism, whenever we receive it, we are all infants in Christ, and the baptismal life means growth until we come personally and in the fellowship of believers to the measure of the stature of his fullness. Nor should the other drastic image of the New Testament be forgotten that we are baptised into Christ's **death**; through that alone does our new birth come. And our baptism, which does not celebrate our human life but our regeneration, is into the whole Christ, incarnate, ministering, crucified, risen, ascended and to come. Into what then are we initiated in baptism? Into Christ and the new life which he came to bring, which is expressed by membership of the Church which is his Body, sometimes in homely, inconspicuous ways of caring and of friendship, 'nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love', often, by work for a better social order and a refusal to acquiesce in any compromise with evil or admission that it will prevail. The baptised carry on Christ's victory, witness in life and death to the triumph of his Cross, know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, and work and pray for the acknowledgement of his rule in all the earth. But the baptismal life extends beyond time and this world altogether. It makes us 'very members incorporate in the mystical body' of God's Son and gives us part in 'the hidden yet real life of . . . the day without evening of the Kingdom'. (Alexander Schmemmann, **Of Water and the Spirit** (SPCK 1974) p.154).

CHRISTIAN INITIATION: RESPONSE TO THE CONNEXIONAL DISCUSSION

We were very grateful indeed for all the letters received and especially for reports on Circuit and District consultations. Though there have been more than thirty documents sent to the convener of the original Working Party, it is not possible to generalise as to how the Report has been received by the Connexion as a whole. The responses have come, understandably, from those who feel most deeply about the issues involved. The majority of these are critical of the Report's conclusions and recommendations, though not unanimously so. There is no doubt that very many people in the Connexion are content with the Report as it stands – it may well represent the majority view but those who feel it inadequate either to their theology or their pastoral problems are too numerous to be ignored. We are grateful to those who have studied the Report so carefully, though one or two correspondents do not seem to have read it. In this reply, we do not propose to deal with questions of biblical exegesis or church history or the body of the Report, but to concentrate on some revision of the final section. The main points for consideration are these:

1. BAPTISM OF INFANTS

The problem of 'indiscriminate' baptism (so-called by some) divides the paedobaptists; some regard it as an 'obscurity', and several attack the doctrine of prevenient grace. Others take the Maurician view that Calvary is the world's baptism and all are its beneficiaries, and it must not be withheld from those who seek it, however inarticulate, folk-religionist or superstitious they are. Some call for a revision of the service of infant baptism so that promises are not required of parents who are not in a position to keep them.

It is clear that the Connexion is divided on this issue, and the Report as it stands accurately reflects the divergent opinions. The matter must be left to the individual consciences of ministers and of the churches.

But we would call attention to what is said in the Report about the need for most serious conversations with parents – and sponsors – before baptism is administered. There may be limits to their ability to grasp some of the issues involved. They may be moved by instinct to do what is best for the child than by understanding the full meaning of baptism or the obligations of Church membership, but teaching about the responsibility involved in the promises – if they are to make them – must not be minimised. Some revision of the 1975 rite of Infant Baptism – or alternative to it – seems called for to meet the complex pastoral situations. Such a Service might give clearer expression to the Theology of Grace.

2. A DUALITY OF PRACTICE

The Report is charged by many people with being rigid and legalistic, and there is once more the expression of the desire to allow believer's baptism even if the candidates have been baptised in infancy. Why cannot there be two baptisms of different kinds? Should not the decision about baptism as a seal of renewal, even by those who have been baptised in infancy, be left to local churches and circuits? Must we put out Ministers and Members who want to remain Methodists but who cannot believe infant baptism is either scriptural or adequate to the Church's mission?

We wish to reaffirm the validity and sufficiency of infant baptism. We agree that scriptural warrant for the unrepeatability of baptism is not best vouched for by Ephesians 4:5, which probably refers to the one Catholic baptism over against that of rival Christian sects, but that the New Testament could not countenance anything which seemed to be a repetition of baptism in the name of Jesus is, we believe, beyond dispute.

- (a) The metaphors used of birth and death (John 3 and Romans 6) surely mean that baptism is once for all.
- (b) Baptism is the sacrament of the finished work of Christ, and just as he died once for all, so are we incorporated into him (Hebrew 10:12). Romans 6 (1-11), in which Paul declares that we are baptised into Christ's death, reaches its climax in what is surely the clinching NT statement on this matter.

We know that Christ, once raised from the dead is never to die again; he is no longer under the dominion of death. For in dying, he died to sin, once for all, and in living as he lives he lives to God.

- (c) In Acts 8, the Samaritans who have been baptised in the name of Jesus but have not received the Holy Spirit, are not baptised again – there is no suggestion that their baptism has been invalid – they are given the apostolic empowering by the laying on of hands. In recalling the New Testament evidence on these and other issues we should not forget the danger of tying the experience of grace too closely to any particular ritual moment.

Anabaptists, like all orthodox Christians, insist that there can be no repetition of Baptism. Of course, as the Report recognises, the demand is not for re-baptism but

for real baptism – and there are some baptised on profession of faith, who entering upon an experience of renewal, regard what happened, perhaps in their teens, as a formality and wish for what they regard as NT Baptism to be the seal of their deepened commitment and sign of the Spirit's renewal which they have recently received.

It is not only infant baptism which may in retrospect be thought not to be 'the real thing'. And there are instances of demand for this, leading to a desire for yet further water ceremonies to acquire true baptism. We must therefore reaffirm that if water is administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, this is Baptism and unrepeatable.

3. THE NEED FOR NEW AND ADDITIONAL RITES

We have already suggested that the 1975 Service of Infant Baptism calls for revision, and in the Report itself that there should be a service of Thanksgiving for those parents who wish to postpone Baptism until their Children are able and willing to answer for themselves. What we now propose in addition is a rite of renewal which will satisfy the undoubted need of those who wish publicly to celebrate their life in the Spirit and which will dramatically remind them of what Baptism means even if they – either as infants or adults – were not fully aware of it at the time.

4. A RITE OF CELEBRATION OF NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

This would not be baptism. But we have come to feel strongly that water must be included and indeed an act of immersion (even though the evidence implies that this was not, as is popularly supposed, the invariable practice in the NT and the early church). We feel that we must learn to live with the risk of confusion for the sake of reconciling those who have such strong convictions about the need for a dramatic rite with water, while at the same time the Church must affirm that baptism is valid even if it is not attended by the fulness of conscious faith, and that it cannot be repeated. A certain ambiguity surrounds all rites. They mean different things to different people, as do verbal formulae. What should remove, for the discerning, any trace of ambiguity, is that what characterises a rite of the Church is the content of the prayer which accompanies the outward sign. The laying on of hands can be used for confirmation, for ordination, for healing, for blessing. What distinguishes these various acts is the accompanying prayer. And so it will be with the use of water in the Rite of Celebration.

The prayer as well as the preliminary statements will make clear that it is not baptism.

Needless to say, this rite will be optional for those who feel they need it to seal their response to their renewed sense of God's salvation. But thanksgiving will be paramount.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) A revision of the 1975 rite of Infant Baptism.
- (2) The preparation of a Service of Thanksgiving for the birth or after the adoption of a child, without baptism.

- (3) A rite for the celebration of new life in the Spirit including the use of water but making it clear by the words used and the prayers offered that this would be neither Baptism nor Rebaptism.
- (4) That consideration should be given to a new rite of Confirmation which would by its nature be much more an act of positive commissioning.

The whole question of the relation of the rites of Christian faith to those 'of passage' which celebrate stages of human growth needs to be a subject of long term study.

We hope and pray that this report will provoke continued study of Christian Initiation in the Church as we seek to hear the voice of the Spirit both in the great traditions and in our own time.

We must emphasise that Church Membership begins at Baptism whatever the age of administration. Another ceremony will be needed at the time when personal commitment is made and the baptised are of an age to undertake definite responsibilities and offices in the Christian community; but Baptism is the sufficient act of Christian Initiation and signifies, along with its other meanings, entry into membership of the Church Universal.

6. THE POSITION OF MINISTERS

The position of Ministers who in the course of their ministries become convinced that they cannot conscientiously administer the Sacrament of Baptism to infants is peculiarly difficult under the Methodist Connexional and Circuit system. The Faith and Order Committee does not feel that it can at this stage offer fresh guidance on this problem. The majority of its members would not wish to proceed beyond the recommendations of the Report of 1975. Further discussion and developments must depend on further initiatives of the Conference.

RESOLUTIONS

That the Conference adopts the Response to the Connexional Discussion of the 1985 Report on Christian Initiation.

That the Conference adopts the amended Report on Christian Initiation.

(Agenda 1987, pp. 602-646)

The Conference adopted the first resolution, adding:

'on the understanding that the references to baptism as conferring membership of the church are to be understood in their context as referring to reception into the congregation of Christ's flock (p. 636) and of entry into the Church Universal (p. 646) and not as departing from or modifying the basis of membership of the Methodist Church as governed by clause 33 of the Deed of Union, nor as prejudicing consideration of the report 'Church Membership and Christian Nurture'.'

The Conference deleted from the RECOMMENDATIONS, page 646 (3), in line 2, 'including the use of water'.

The relevant paragraphs can be found on p. 91 (4a), p. 100 (last paragraph) and p. 99 (recommendation 3) in the present volume.

The Conference adopted the second resolution on the same understanding as to membership as in the case of the first resolution.

The Conference also directed the Faith and Order Committee to consider whether ministers may be in full connexion with the Conference provided they do not dispute the principle of infant baptism and are willing to commend those who seek baptism for their children to ministers who practice infant baptism, and to present a report to the next Conference.

INFANT BAPTISM AND MINISTERIAL DISCIPLINE (1988)

INTRODUCTION:

1. In 1987 the Conference passed the following resolution, presented to it as a Notice of Motion:

‘The Conference directs the Faith & Order Committee to consider whether ministers maybe in Full Connexion with the Conference provided they do not dispute the principle of infant baptism and are willing to commend those who seek baptism for their children to ministers who practice infant baptism, and to present a report to the next Conference.’

2. The Faith & Order Committee believes that the Notice of Motion raises a highly sensitive matter. Since change in our long-established practice would have far-reaching consequences for the whole life of the church and because it would constitute a radical departure from the Methodist Church’s traditional position on this issue, the Faith & Order Committee has taken the view in the following paragraphs that it is incumbent upon those who favour changing our present discipline to provide overwhelming argument to demonstrate why the change should be made. The Committee has examined carefully the arguments in favour of change and has concluded, not only that they are insufficiently persuasive, but also that there are strong positive arguments in favour of maintaining our present discipline.

3. A distinction must be made between two groups of ministers whose resignations have in the past been associated with this issue:

- (i) Those who apart from the question of infant baptism are loyal and committed Methodist ministers and who strongly desire to remain in our ministry.
- (ii) Those for whom the question of infant baptism is only a symptom of their much deeper and wider uneasiness within Methodism. Infant baptism may be the occasion or pretext of their resignation, but not the sole cause.

It would be deeply unjust to suggest that all ministers who refuse to baptise infants fall into this second category. Not all fall within the first.

4. The resolution is about ministers who refuse to baptise infants **in all circumstances**. Such ministers must be distinguished carefully from those who decline the request for baptism on some occasions – when for example there is judged to be insufficient evidence of the parents’ faith or commitment to the church.

This is the reason for S.O. 520 (2) which reads: ‘It is the duty of ministers in full connexion to be willing to baptise infants in appropriate circumstances.’ Consequently, in what follows, when referring to ministers who refuse to baptise infants, the Conference resolution is interpreted as meaning ‘ministers who refuse to baptise infants in all circumstances’.

5. It is not clear whether the intention of the resolution is that S.O. 520 (2) should be revoked. It could be argued that the church should continue to require of ordinands a willingness to baptise infants (as required by the S.O.), allowing a 'conscience clause' only for those who later change their mind. Such a position might, however, be judged to be radically unstable. The implication of the motion appears to be that S.O. 520 (2) should be revoked. Thus, the ordained ministry would be open to those who refuse to baptise infants, and not merely remain open to those who, having been paedobaptist at ordination, later change their minds.

6. Were the Faith & Order Committee to recommend a change in our discipline consideration would necessarily have to be given to the meaning of the phrase in the resolution 'provided they do not dispute the principle of infant baptism'. Presumably the writers of the resolution had **public** disputation in mind, since such ministers are bound to dispute the principle privately. Otherwise they would not be unwilling to baptise infants. But what constitutes **public** disputation, and what constitutes a **disputation**? Arguably, the simple refusal to baptise infants constitutes in itself a disputation of the principle of infant baptism. Since the issue could conceivably be tested in the courts of the land it would need to be clarified as much as possible.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF A CHANGE IN OUR DISCIPLINE

1 The Argument from Compassion:

Ministers who are forced to leave our church because of a changed conviction over this issue face considerable suffering. They and their families confront domestic upheaval and probably financial hardship. There is the loss of colleagues and the support and friendship of a church in which they have served. A compassionate church should not subject ministers and their families to all this for this one cause. To deny the exercise of a ministry on these grounds alone, when in all other regards Methodist belief and practice is accepted, is insensitive and unjust.

2 The Argument from Loss:

Excellent ministers who should be enriching the life of our church have been lost to us because of our requirement that ministers must be willing to baptise infants in appropriate circumstances. A change in our discipline would eliminate this loss.

3 The Argument from the 'Boundaries of Faith':

It cannot be argued that commitment to infant Baptism is central to Christian faith, as is belief in God or belief in Christ. The church has no right to exclude from its ministry those who refuse a practice which is not part of the kernel of our belief – that which is not unambiguously attested in scripture and which has no place in the ancient creeds or Councils of the Church.

4 The Argument from Toleration:

Methodism is a 'broad church' which embraces considerable diversity in belief and practice. Wesley's sermons on **A Caution Against Biogtry** and **The Catholic Spirit** are among our foundation documents. It is inconsistent with the pluralism of our church to adopt a 'hard line' over this issue. Our church includes those who

differ radically over the authority of scripture, atonement theology, sexual ethics, etc. There should be a similar acceptance of diversity over baptismal practice.

5 The Argument from Disruption in the Church's Life:

When a minister feels obliged to resign the appointment will be unfilled at least until the end of the Connexional year. More significantly, distress will be caused in the local congregation by those who love and respect the minister and appreciate his/her ministry. There will be sadness that the minister is no longer able to serve among us. All this would be avoided if our discipline were to be relaxed. It may, however be acknowledged that under our present discipline ministers often agree to remain to the end of the Connexional year in order not to cause any greater disturbance than is strictly necessary.

6 The Argument from Ecumenism:

It is inevitable that the 'coming great church' will contain two patterns of Christian initiation – i.e. the one based on infant baptism and the other based on believers' baptism. In recognition of this our church should tolerate a similar duality today. In many areas the denominational configuration of church life and ordained ministry is being broken down. Sometimes the 'mood' of a local church is turning away from the paedobaptist position, perhaps partly because members of the congregation have roots in traditions other than Methodism. We should anticipate the character of the 'coming great church' by allowing ministers who refuse to baptise infants to remain in Full Connexion.

7 The Argument from the Experience of the URC:

The United Reformed Church, by including the Churches of Christ, embraced a dual practice and this works without difficulty. The experience of this church could and should be ours.

8 The Argument from the Deed of Union:

In its statement of our doctrinal standards the Deed of Union refers only to the Sacrament of **Baptism**. (Clause 30). The practice of **infant** baptism is spoken of simply as our **usage** (Clause 33[i]). We are guilty of inconsistency with our foundation documents if we require our ministers to adopt what is stated as being merely a usage, and not a doctrine.

9 The Argument from Comparison with Lay People:

Whilst members of the Methodist Church are exhorted to 'present their children to Christ in baptism'¹ there is no question of discipline of those who believe it is right for them to wait until their children are able to answer for themselves. There appears to be an inconsistency in the position of a church which allows Methodist parents to make this decision for their own children, but does not allow ministers to make it for their ministerial practice. Why is the freedom given to members not extended to ministers? Likewise, it is strange that we allow ministers to withhold baptism from their own children, but insist that they baptise other people's children on pain of exclusion from our ministry. Similarly, those who decide not to have their own children baptised may feel that their convictions are being slighted by a church which insists that ministers be willing to baptise children in appropriate circumstances.

10 The Argument from the Unreasonableness of the Baptist Alternative:

We must resist the argument that if ministers refuse to baptise infants, then they are baptists and should be expected to leave our ministry and transfer to that of the Baptist Church. This oversimplifies a very complex situation and reflects a lack of pastoral sensitivity. Many such ministers wish to remain Methodists and have no desire to join another church. It is unreasonable and insensitive to suggest people may move easily from one church to another simply on the basis of one issue, and it is wrong to suggest that the Baptist Church is defined simply with regard to this one issue.

11 The Argument from Analogy with Remarriage:

Ministers are allowed the privilege of a 'conscious clause' when asked to remarry divorcees. (S.O. 830) A similar provision should exist with regard to infant baptism. The church is being inconsistent in allowing it in the one case, but withholding it in the other.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST A CHANGE IN OUR DISCIPLINE

Whilst acknowledging that some of the arguments against our present discipline have some force, the Faith & Order Committee is for the following reasons unconvinced by the case for change.

1 Response to the 'Argument from Compassion':

It is agreed that considerable anguish may be caused when ministers have to leave us. A compassionate church must be acutely sensitive to this and do everything possible to minimise suffering. The 'argument from compassion' does constitute a *prima facie* case against our present practice. Without further argument it would leave the onus of proof with those who wish to maintain our current discipline.

2 Response to the 'Argument from Loss':

It must be agreed that it is profoundly to be regretted when committed ministers who have served the church well have to leave. We deeply deplore their loss to our church. It must be insisted, however, that loss will not be eliminated merely by relaxing our discipline. Any policy adopted will alienate some. Arguably there will be those who will resign from our ministry should our discipline be relaxed; others who might otherwise offer for our ministry might instead offer for that of another church. Furthermore, and probably much more significantly, experience shows that there is a loss of lay people when ministers refuse to baptise children.

3 Response to the argument from the 'Boundaries of our Faith':

A twofold response may be offered:

(i) The issue is not what is or is not central to our faith, but rather what it is reasonable for a church to require of its ordained ministry. The premise of the argument may be accepted, i.e. that although infant baptism is profoundly expressive of Methodism's conviction about the prevenience of the grace of God, it is clearly subordinate to central beliefs about God in Christ. It is not part of the kernel as these beliefs are.

A church, however, is entitled to lay down certain requirements of its ordained ministry and cannot be expected to accept into its ministry people who deviate from its discipline and practice in all respects except those that relate to the absolute fundamentals of the Faith. There is a common understanding, implicit or explicit, that ministers will, for example, conduct worship on the Circuit Plan, preside at meetings of Managing Trustees, attend Circuit meetings and District synods, preside at celebrations of the Lord's Supper, conduct Covenant services, funerals and weddings, prepare people for confirmation, be subject to the itinerant system and stationing, etc. Of course, all these expectations have to be justified. The church is answerable to the Gospel, to reason and to the demands of tolerance and compassion. The fact remains that a church is entitled to define requirements for its ordained ministry, and it is reasonable that a willingness to offer infant baptism be included among these things. What, it may be asked, would be the response of our church if a minister, in like fashion, refused to conduct Communion services or to prepare people for reception into full membership?

(ii) The argument easily backfires upon its exponents. If the issue of infant baptism is claimed to be insufficiently significant to serve as grounds for exclusion from our ministry, why is it regarded by its opponents as being an issue over which they feel so strongly that they refuse to offer it to committed members who in good faith believe in it and request it for their children? If its opponents are to be allowed to regard this issue as being of such importance, then so also must its supporters.

4 Response to the 'Argument from Toleration':

It must be allowed that this argument is a strong one, and as in the case of the 'argument from compassion' the onus of justification lies with those who support the present discipline. Two points are therefore offered in response:

(i) Despite the rich diversity within the Methodist Church there are bound to be limits beyond which belief and practice is unacceptable. As John Locke pointed out,² the State has a particular responsibility to exercise wide toleration since no citizen can escape being subject to the State. By contrast a church is entitled to have a stricter control over belief and practice because people are not bound to be part of it. It is acknowledged that this kind of argument could be used to support an unhealthy denominationalism. It is, however, the belief of the Faith & Order Committee that infant baptism is so central to Methodist church life that it is difficult to understand how a minister can minister among us without being willing to practice it. Whilst every church is subservient to the Gospel and has a duty to exercise toleration, it also has every right to lay down obligations and expectations of its ordained ministry.

Thus, Methodist ministers are reasonably expected to baptise infants as they are reasonably expected to preside at the Lord's Supper. Furthermore since S. O. 520 (2) has been in existence for over a decade now, there can be no doubt as to what is expected of a minister in this matter.

(ii) Perhaps a more significant response to the 'argument from toleration' claims that it is not a church which requires its ministers to baptise infants that is being guilty of intolerance and lack of graciousness; it is rather these ministers themselves. This is because such ministers refuse to act in their representative capacity in offering to their members what in good conscience those members wish for their children, and which is a central part of Methodist practice. They are showing intolerance to paedobaptists within their congregations by refusing to offer

baptism when it is requested. The church tolerates a minister's own reservations about infant baptism. It tolerates a minister's decision not to have his or her own children baptised. But it believes it is justified in refusing to tolerate a minister's refusal to offer the sacrament to loyal members who request it. Thus, those who contrast the church's 'hard line' on infant baptism with our acceptance of diversity over doctrines of atonement, approaches to scripture, etc., miss the point. The issue is not the existence of diversity of viewpoint. It is rather the refusal of ministers to exercise a full ministry to their congregations by declining to baptise infants. Paradoxically then, our present discipline preserves rather than limits proper diversity and tolerance within our church.

5 Response to the 'Argument from Disruption':

It must be allowed that this argument has force. A minister cannot resign without the church feeling pain. On the other hand, it must be insisted that there will also be hurt, confusion and distress, if congregations have ministers who refuse to baptise infants. Where ministers so refuse there are bound to be problems in the local church – whether our discipline is applied or not. The difficulties will vary from one situation to another. What is clear, however, is that we cannot eliminate local difficulties merely by relaxing our discipline. Whatever position the church takes on this issue there is going to be pain. In view of our tradition it is reasonable to believe that there will be more pain if ministers who refuse to baptise infants are permitted to remain in pastoral charge than is the case with our present discipline.

6 Response to the 'Argument from Ecumenism':

It is true that if there is to be a 'coming great church' it will probably practice both believers' and infant baptism. This consideration does not necessarily mean, however, that Methodism should, irrespective of its ethos, doctrine and history, change its present practice. Furthermore, this argument – although advanced against our present discipline – is really more effectively deployed in support of it, since on the premise that a church should offer both patterns of Christian initiation (i.e. paedobaptism and believers' baptism) critics of our present discipline proceed to argue that individual ministers should be allowed to offer only one. A more reasonable conclusion would be that if a church is to offer both patterns (as in fact our church does), so also should ministers acting in their representative capacity. Certainly, there are a few Methodist congregations in which the mood is against paedobaptism although we must beware of judging the ethos of a congregation on the basis of a few vocal members. Again, even if the majority of a congregation is of the believers' baptist position, provision still has to be made for the paedobaptists within it and even if there are some local churches that would be content with a minister who refused to baptise infants it is doubtful if there are any such 'sections' within the Connexion.

7 Response to the 'Argument from the Experience of the URC':

The experience of the URC is hardly relevant to our situation since the Methodist Church is a Connexion with a system of stationing, whilst the URC has a strong congregational element, congregations sometimes having their own distinctive character. Thus, within that church those who refuse to baptise infants will not normally be appointed to paedobaptist congregations.

8 Response to the ‘Argument from the Deed of Union’:

This argument begs the question that the writers of the Deed carefully distinguished doctrine from usage, believing that the latter did not express the former and that it had lower significance than the former. It also fails to recognise that the Conference has consistently, in its interpretations of ‘our doctrines’, regarded infant baptism as profoundly expressive of our central beliefs. Hence, there is in the Methodist Church a weighty theology of **infant** baptism.

9 Response to the ‘Argument from Comparison with Laypeople’:

This argument entirely misses the point. The issue is not about ministers who decide to withhold baptism from their children. Such ministers are not disciplined. The issue concerns rather ministers who refuse to baptise other people’s children in appropriate circumstances, thereby failing to act in their representative capacity by offering a full ministry to their congregations. Furthermore, if the Church insists that ministers baptise children this does not mean that the Church is slighting those parents who do not seek baptism for their children. The issue is not what parents may or may not decide for their children. It is rather the obligation of ministers to offer to their congregations the sacraments accepted by our church and according to our usage.

10 Response to the ‘Argument from the Unreasonableness of the Baptist Alternative’:

Ministers rarely seek ordination in another church with only one issue in mind. Other deeply held convictions make it unlikely that identification with another Church will be simple to make. The committee accepts the spirit of this argument. In no way must one make light of the prospect of a minister having to resign and seek service in the ordained ministry of another church. In view of the arguments advanced in this report, however, this consideration is not alone a decisive one against our present discipline.

11 Response to the ‘Argument from Analogy with Remarriage’:

It is the unsatisfactoriness of this analogy that leads us to one of the central issues. Infant baptism is not like a tooth, which once removed from the life of the local church would leave everything else exactly as it is. It expresses profoundly much of what Methodists believe about the prevenience of the grace of God and the character of Christian community. It is an integral part of a local church’s mission and programme of Christian nurture. It is therefore difficult to see how a minister can refuse to baptise **infants** and serve as minister of such a local church. Is the font – small because it is designed for infant baptisms – to be removed from the sanctuary when such a minister leads worship? How are such ministers to relate to the work of the Cradle Roll secretary? Will they regard the children of the Sunday School as part of the church, and if so why will they not baptise them? If they are to be regarded as ‘little pagans’³ how will such ministers relate to the Sunday School teachers who regard them as being part of the church? Can such ministers conduct the confirmation service of those baptised as infants where the words spoken are: ‘Beloved in Christ, at your Baptism . . .’⁴ It may be acknowledged that with goodwill and wide sympathies these problems may sometimes be overcome. The fact remains, however, as the place of the font in our arrangement of sanctuary furniture indicates, infant baptism is central to the life, mission and doctrine of our

church. It cannot therefore be separated from the rest of a ministry and simply given over to a colleague as the resolution assumes.

Further, the resolution might be taken as implying a mechanical view of sacramental efficacy in that it speaks of infant baptism in isolation from the life and mission of the church over which the refusing minister has pastoral charge. It might also be taken to imply a view of the work of the ordained ministry divorced from the ministry of the congregation as a whole. It is precisely for these reasons that the analogy between baptism and the remarriage of divorced persons break down. Infant baptism is integral to a local church's life and mission. The remarriage of those whose previous marriage has been dissolved, whilst it may be thought of as an important expression of the church's care, is not.

Along these lines it must be asked how in churches under the care of ministers who refuse to baptise infants there is to be proper provision for teaching and preaching about infant baptism. According to the proposed resolution the minister will not dispute the principle of infant baptism; but who is to explain and defend it?

In addition to responding, as above, to the case in favour of change, the Committee offers the following further considerations in support of our present discipline.

The Legitimate Expectations of Congregations:

It is right to be sensitive to the convictions of ministers who feel unable to baptise children. On the other hand, we must also be sensitive to Methodist members who desire baptism for their children. They are encouraged to seek it in our official statements and they have a legitimate expectation that their minister will baptise them. They have every right to believe that a Methodist minister appointed by the Conference has an obligation to offer the sacraments recognised by that church in accordance with its usage. They might justifiably feel hurt and rejected when asked to 'go elsewhere' for what they believe is rightfully theirs within the local church. There is in referral to a colleague the clear implication that the referring minister does not approve of what is being done. The Committee accepts that in a responsibly and wisely handled pastoral situation these difficulties may be minimised. The legitimate expectations of congregations, however, remain and must not be neglected.

Practical Difficulties:

The practical difficulties implicit in the proposals are considerable and should not be ignored. The proposal envisages parents directed towards a colleague by ministers who refuse to baptise infants. Presumably the colleague will be responsible for the baptismal preparation as well as for the conduct of the service. This will place an additional burden upon the colleague – and all ministers are hard-pressed as it is. Furthermore, since most Methodists wish their children to be baptised in the church they attend, the Circuit Plan will have to be made with provision for ministers conducting services in churches not within their pastoral care more frequently than would otherwise be the case. These difficulties are not insuperable. The extent of them should not, however, be underestimated. Nor should their potential for creating ill-feeling. Just as lay people have a right to expect that their minister will baptise infants, so ministers also have a right to expect that their colleagues will take responsibility for the whole range of ministerial duties. The Committee acknowledges that if the principle of our present discipline were shown to be mistaken, then the Church would have to live with the

practical difficulties involved in changing it. Since, however, the Committee believes that principle to be sound it is right that attention be drawn to the practical problems that would ensue were it to be changed.

The Minister as a Representative Person:

One point implicit in the arguments thusfar is sufficiently important to be made separately and explicitly. Ministers play a leading part in a church life which is not entirely of their own making. As representative persons they cannot avoid being associated with practices and customs of which they may not fully approve. These may include the local traditions at funerals, the pattern of worship at Sunday School Anniversaries, the requirement that the Superintendent minister or the Superintendent's deputy chair the meeting of the Managing Trustees, the use of individual glasses at the Lord's Supper, and a host of other things. These may be trivial examples compared with infant baptism, but that does not affect the point. Ministers must serve the church as it is and not simply as they would wish it to be. Likewise they must minister to people where they are and as they are – including those who are convinced paedobaptists.

Whilst no minister can be a 'time server', neglecting the prophetic and teaching ministry, at the same time an individualism which refuses to bend for the sake of the wider life of the church or to respond pastorally to people in their diversity, is equally unacceptable. Ministers who refuse to baptise children may be failing to recognise the duties incumbent upon ministers when acting in a representative capacity. It is one thing to have reservations about infant baptism and to believe that believers' baptism should be the norm. It is quite another to refuse infant baptism to loyal members in good standing who believe in it and request it for their children.

The Problem of Stationing:

A change in our discipline would have profound implications for stationing – probably greater than can at present be fully envisaged. The Methodist Church is distinctive in that through stationing:

- (i) ministers are guaranteed a station if there is one available, and
- (ii) circuits are expected to accept whomsoever the Conference will send.

This places obligations upon ministers to exercise a ministry of a catholic character acceptable throughout the Connexion. It also places upon the church the obligation to station only those who exercise such a ministry.

In present circumstances every effort is made by the Stationing Committee to match minister and circuit to each other taking account of a wide variety of considerations. It might be claimed that that is all that would be required if our present baptismal discipline were to be relaxed. The following kind of acute dilemma might none the less arise. A group of ministers who refuse to baptise infants have no appointments and so ask to be stationed. Does the Conference have the moral right to station these ministers in circuits which seek ministers who will baptise infants? Indeed are there are circuits which do not? Can a minister accept the security of the stationing system without its responsibilities?

Again, suppose an area of the country has a high concentration of ministers unwilling to baptise infants. Is the Stationing Committee to move, against their own

wishes and against the wishes of their circuits, ministers who are willing to baptise infants in order to make provision for this sacrament?

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that the norm in Methodism is not the geographically small circuit with five churches, three ministers and four supernumeraries. In many areas ministers are 'thin on the ground'. Many circuits have only one or two ministers. It is difficult to see how ordained ministry could be sustained in some areas unless ministers are willing to baptise infants. The Stationing Committee could thus be faced with insoluble problems if our discipline were to be changed.

Conclusion:

The Committee recommends no change in present ministerial discipline in relation to the baptism of infants.

Notes

- 1 *Methodist Service Book A2*
- 2 John Locke, *A Letter on Toleration*, Edited by J. W. Gough. OUP. (1968) 79ff.
- 3 D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, Faber (1957) 81.
- 4 *Methodist Service Book A21*

RESOLUTIONS

- 1 (Ministerial Session)

The Conference adopts the report.

- 2 (Representative Session)

The Representative Session of the Conference takes note of the decision of the Ministerial Session in relation to Resolution 1.

(Agenda 1988, pp.807-817)

The Ministerial Session adopted Resolution 1 and agreed to 'a report of the discussion on Infant Baptism and Ministerial Discipline being given to the Representative Session'.

In the Representative Session, Resolution 2 was withdrawn, and the Conference adopted the following:

'The Conference in its Representative Session adopts the report.'

(ii) Membership

RECOGNITION, RECEPTION AND CONFIRMATION (1992)

A) Introduction

1. The Conference of 1991 referred the following Notice of Motion (No.58) to the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee:

Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to consider the inter-relationship of the terms "Recognition", "Reception" and "Confirmation", as used in the Deed of Union and Standing Orders, and report to the Conference, making such recommendations as would assist the Methodist Church to clarify its understanding and practices relating to the admission of members.

2. The Notice of Motion was presented after an item of Provisional Legislation, dealing with these issues and seeking to amend the Deed of Union, had failed to achieve the three-fourths majority required for its ratification. The debate on this item in the Conference revealed that there was widespread confusion about its intended purpose and effect.

3. We must also note Suggestion S3 (1991) from the Isle of Man Synod:

This Synod believes that the Service of Public Reception into Full Membership or Confirmation should now be called simply the Confirmation Service.

The Conference adopted the recommended reply:

The Memorials Committee points out that the 1990 Conference adopted Part A of the report, "Church Membership and Christian Nurture", prepared by the Division of Ministries in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee. This recommended that, in the interests of accuracy, clarity and consistency, it should be made evident in the Church's liturgy and constitution (1) that people are admitted into membership by the Church Council and (2) that they are confirmed in an act of worship at which it is appropriate to recognize them as having been admitted into membership. In the light of this, the Conference adopted a proposed amendment to the Deed of Union, which, as provisional legislation, will be before the Conference of 1991. Furthermore, the Conference will be asked to authorize a service entitled "Public Recognition and Confirmation of Full Members", which has been prepared by the Faith and Order Committee. The Memorials Committee recommends, therefore, that the reply of the Conference is contained in its own resolutions.

4. The Conference's own resolutions, however, did not directly address the point made by the Suggestion, inasmuch as the relevant item of provisional

legislation was not ratified, and Notice of Motion No.58 was referred to the Faith and Order and Law and Polity Committees. The present report has been prepared by the Faith and Order Committee. The Law and Polity Committee has been consulted but, as indicated in paragraph 19 below, is unable to support the report's recommendation as to the best way forward.

B Membership

5. Methodism's self-understanding, and its attempts to express that self-understanding in words, reveal a fundamental tension. On the one hand, we reflect our origins as a *society* within the Church of England; on the other hand, after two centuries of growth and development under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we perceive ourselves, and others perceive us, as a *Church*.
6. One consequence of the continuing use of language appropriate for a society within the context of a Church is the variety of models which underlie our use of the word 'membership'. We assert that baptism confers membership 'of God's family the Church' (*MSB*, pp.A7, A21). This membership, however, is distinct from membership of the Methodist Church as understood by the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.
7. The Deed of Union refers sometimes to 'membership' and sometimes to 'full membership', indicating that the two terms are inter-changeable:

'member of the Methodist Church' and 'full member of the Methodist Church' are equivalent expressions and mean a person recognized as a member of the Methodist Church under the provisions of this Deed and of Standing Orders. (*Deed of Union*, Clause 1 (xviii))
8. The term 'full membership' was adopted by the Conference of 1962 on the advice of the Faith and Order Committee in an attempt to find language which would accommodate two convictions: first, that baptism confers membership of the Church, and, second, that the membership conferred by baptism is in some sense incomplete until it is accompanied by personal faith and commitment. Thirty years later, it has to be admitted that the term 'full member', though an improvement upon the earlier term 'new member', is not satisfactory. While it is certainly true that to live the Christian life requires personal faith and commitment, it is wrong to suggest that the membership of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is conveyed by baptism, is incomplete. Membership of the Methodist Church, as understood by the Deed of Union and Standing Orders, is a concept which arises from our origins as a society and the epithet 'full', when used to describe it, suggests more questions than it can answer. The proposal will therefore be made that the use of the word 'full' be discontinued before the word 'member' and related words.

C Admission/recognition/reception into membership

9. Clause 8(b) of the Deed of Union reads as follows:

After a probation of not less than three months those approved shall be admitted to full membership by the Church Council on the recommendation of the Pastoral Committee and be publicly recognised at the earliest opportunity at a service to be known as the Service of

Reception into Full Membership or Confirmation conducted by the minister in the presence of the Local Church and including the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

10. This clause highlights a major problem. It is stated that those approved are *admitted to full membership by the Church Council*. In other words, it is the decision of the Church Council that admits people into membership of the Methodist Church. But the service required by this clause is to be known as 'Reception into Full Membership or Confirmation', which suggests that it is in the liturgical act that people become members. The statement in the 1975 service itself, 'We welcome you into the full membership of the Christian Church and the society in this place', implies that members are 'made' during the service.
11. Thus clause 8(b) points up a confusion which is undoubtedly felt among many of our people: *when* does a person become a member – when the Church Council votes, or when he or she is received into membership during the service of Reception? Is the service meant to 'make' members, or to *recognize* them as members whom the Church Council has already admitted into membership?
12. Clause 8(b) employs all three concepts, *recognition*, *admission*, and *reception*. It is clearly desirable that this clause be amended in order to dispel confusion.

D Confirmation

13. A further complication arises from our use of the word "Confirmation", which we have often employed as though it were synonymous with Reception into Full Membership. But, as the Report to the 1962 Conference (cited above) makes clear, 'the two titles . . . are not simply interchangeable, but refer to different aspects of a complex whole'.
14. The origins of Confirmation lie in the rite of Baptism itself, from which, in the West, Confirmation became detached in the early Middle Ages. The traditional understanding of Confirmation among Christians of the Roman, Anglican and Lutheran communions, reflected in previous Methodist writing on the subject, identifies two major elements in the rite. On the one hand, the Church prays that God will confirm (that is, strengthen) his servants for lifelong service. On the other hand, the candidates themselves confirm their membership of the Church, conferred by Baptism, and it has been characteristic of some Methodist thinking to see confirmation as a means of marking ritually the experience of coming to personal faith. To these important elements we might add a third: the concept of the Church as a confirming community, surrounding the candidates with prayer and love, and affirming their place within the corporate fellowship. But the emphasis should always be on God's confirming work: "Lord, confirm your servant *N* by your Holy Spirit, that he/she may continue to be yours for ever." First and foremost, it is God who confirms.
15. There is a distinction to be drawn between Confirmation and (full) membership. Membership of the denomination may lapse, but a confirmed person never ceases to be a confirmed person. This sort of distinction is

already familiar to us in respect of ministers, who are both ordained and received into full connexion. A minister may cease to be in full connexion, but never ceases to be an ordained person even though he or she may not be allowed to act as such within the discipline of the Church. He or she may be received again into full connexion, but cannot be ordained again. Similarly, a person who has ceased to be a member of the Methodist Church may, later, be restored to membership, but cannot be confirmed again.

16. It is important to recognize, therefore, that confirmation and reception into (or recognition of) membership are distinct events, with different significance. The title, 'Reception into Full Membership, or Confirmation' suggests that the two terms are alternative ways of describing the same thing, and thus obscures an important distinction.

There is therefore a case to be made for the emendation not only of clause 8(b) of the Deed of Union, where this title is used, but also of clause 8(c), which reads:

If any have not received Christian baptism that sacrament should be administered either before or in connection with the Service of Reception into Full Membership or Confirmation.

E Possible Ways Forward

17. It would, of course, be possible simply to let matters rest where they are, making no alteration to Clause 8 of the Deed of Union; but in view of the confusions mentioned in sections B, C and D above, this option does not seem satisfactory.
18. A second option would be to dispense with the concept of 'membership' entirely, perhaps in favour of a system akin to the Anglican electoral roll, on which all baptized persons associated with a local church can be registered. If this were to happen, the liturgical emphasis would be solely on the act of confirmation, as the Suggestion from the Isle of Man Synod proposed. But such a development would require not only major changes to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders, but also an abandonment of a significant part of Methodism's societal heritage. There is no evidence to suggest that there would be widespread support for such a momentous change of policy throughout the Connexion; and indeed many of the views expressed during the debate on these issues in the 1991 Conference suggest the opposite.
19. A third possibility is that the Deed of Union be amended in order to reinforce what is surely the intention of Clauses 8 (b) and (c) of the Deed, while removing ambiguities. On this basis, the admission or reception of members would be seen as the responsibility of the Church Council, and the subsequent service would be one of confirmation, during which those recently made members by the Council could also be recognized and welcomed. Such a course would clearly distinguish between membership and confirmation, an elegant reminder of Methodism's dual identity as society and Church. The societal element (reception into membership) would take place in the Church Council; the 'Church' element would be the act of confirmation. This is the option which the Law and Polity Committee favours, but the Faith and Order Committee believes that a stronger case can be made for a fourth course.

20. This fourth possibility is the alteration of Clause 8(b) in order to put the emphasis firmly on the liturgical act of confirming and receiving into membership, by indicating that the Church Council's role is to give approval for the reception into membership and confirmation of named persons. This would mean that the Church Council no longer *admitted* into membership; such admission or reception would be deemed to occur within the service itself. The Council's role would be to approve the names of those to be received during the service.
21. This would, admittedly, mark a significant departure from the long tradition that the Local Church's highest court (once the Leaders' Meeting, now the Church Council) has the privilege and responsibility of admitting into membership. That tradition, however, does not reflect popular understanding of what is taking place in the service, namely that it is indeed in the service itself that people are received into membership. Earlier this century, when names of 'new members' were added to pastoral lists by votes in Leaders' Meetings, often without any training of such members or any liturgical act to accompany their reception, the tradition had meaning. But emphasis on training and preparation classes and the very proper requirement that a service of reception should be held have seriously undermined that meaning. None of this should be taken to mean that the Church Council does not have an important part to play in the processes whereby people are received into membership of the Methodist Church, but rather that the Council's role is more appropriately one of approving candidates for membership than one of admitting them into membership.
22. Moreover, the great merit of this fourth option is the prominence that would be given to the act of worship and what occurs during it. Worship is dynamic; in and through liturgical acts God can cause things to happen. It is entirely appropriate that the making of members of the Methodist Church should be seen as taking place, alongside their Confirmation, in an act of worship in the presence of the whole Church, rather than in a meeting of the Church Council. At the same time, the Church Council should retain the responsibility of approving the names of candidates for reception into membership and confirmation.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the Report.

The Conference adopts the following amendments to the Deed of Union:

- (i) for the existing clause 1 (xviii) substitute:

'member of the Methodist Church' means a person recognised as a member of the Methodist Church under the provisions of this Deed and of Standing Orders;

(ii) for the existing clause 8 substitute:

8 Admission to Membership

(a) All those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accept the obligation to serve him in the life of the Church and the world are welcome as members of the Methodist Church.

(b) After a probation of not less than three months those approved by the Church Council on the recommendation of the Pastoral Committee shall at the earliest opportunity be publicly received as members of the Methodist Church and confirmed at a service conducted by the minister in the presence of the Local Church and including the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

(c) If any have not received Christian baptism that sacrament should be administered either before or in connection with the service of reception and confirmation.

(d) Provision may be made by Standing Order for the reception into membership and confirmation of persons approved by the Church Council in accordance with sub-clause (b) above but unavoidably absent from the service provided for by that sub-clause.

(iii) In clause 10, delete the word 'full'.

The Conference adopts the following amendments to Standing Orders:

(i) In Standing Order 002(1) (xv) delete the words 'and full member of the Methodist Church'.

(ii) In Standing Orders 633(4), 700(1), 811(2) [twice], 811(3), 811(4), 815, 1070(7) (b) [twice], and 1070(7) (c) (iii), delete the word 'full'.

(iii) For the existing Standing Order 004 (iv) substitute:

(iv) 'member' and 'members' refer to membership of the Methodist Church unless some other body or institution is indicated, and 'membership' has a corresponding meaning.

(iv) In Standing Orders 524(ii) 804 for 'full membership or confirmation' substitute 'membership and confirmation'.

(Agenda 1992, pp.107-113, with the resolutions in the amended form in which they were presented to the Conference)

The Conference adopted the above resolutions, and also the following:

'The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring to the Conference of 1993 proposals for such further amendments to Standing Orders as may be required if the amendments to Clause 8 of the Deed of Union are confirmed by that Conference.'

RECOGNITION, RECEPTION AND CONFIRMATION (1993)

The following resolutions were adopted by the Conference of 1992:

1. The Conference adopts the following amendments to the Deed of Union :
 - (i) for the existing clause 1 (xviii) substitute:

‘member of the Methodist Church’ means a person recognised as a member of the Methodist Church under the provisions of this Deed and of Standing Orders;
 - (ii) for the existing clause 8 substitute:

8 Admission to Membership

 - (a) All those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accept the obligation to serve him in the life of the Church and the world are welcome as members of the Methodist Church.
 - (b) After a probation of not less than three months those approved by the Church Council on the recommendation of the Pastoral Committee shall at the earliest opportunity be publicly received as members of the Methodist Church and confirmed at a service conducted by the minister in the presence of the Local Church and including the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
 - (c) If any have not received Christian baptism that sacrament should be administered either before or in connection with the service of reception and confirmation.
 - (d) Provision may be made by Standing Order for the reception into membership and confirmation of persons approved by the Church Council in accordance with sub-clause (b) above but unavoidably absent from the service provided for by that sub-clause.
 - (iii) In clause 10, delete the word ‘full’.
2. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring to the Conference of 1993 proposals for such further amendments to Standing Orders as may be required if the amendments to Clause 8 of the Deed of Union are confirmed by that Conference.

The amendments to the Deed of Union are Provisional Legislation. If they are confirmed by the Conference of 1993, further changes need to be made to Standing Orders. The Faith and Order Committee recommends that the amendments incorporated in resolution B2 be adopted.

The attention of the Committee has recently been drawn to the fact that difficulties now arise about Direction 4 on page A43 of *The Methodist Service Book*, which concerns persons being received from other Christian communions from which straightforward transfer is not possible. The Committee believes that it would be more consistent with the amended version of the Deed of Union if Direction 4 were interpreted as if it read “the Church Council shall approve their admission into membership” instead of “the Church Council shall admit them into full

membership” and “they shall” instead of “then, if pastoral reasons so require, they may”.

RESOLUTIONS

- 1 The Conference adopts the Report.
- 2 The Conference adopts the following amendments to Standing Orders:
 - (i) for the existing Standing Order 803(2) substitute:
 - (2) Being thus satisfied the committee shall recommend such candidates, after not less than three months in training, to the Church Council for approval.
 - (ii) for the existing Standing Order 804 substitute:

804 Public Service. (1) A public service of reception into membership and confirmation should be held at least once a year either for a Local Church or for a group of Local Churches.

(2) If any candidate approved by the Church Council is unavoidably absent from the public service of reception and confirmation the Minister shall arrange for his or her reception and confirmation at a suitable time and place in the presence of members of the Local Church.

(Agenda 1993, pp.245-246)

The amendments to the Deed of Union were confirmed by the 1993 Conference. The Conference dealt with the above resolutions as follows:

The Conference adopted Resolution 1, adding as additional paragraphs of the Report:

‘The adoption by the Conference of the proposed amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders will cause inconsistency between the Deed and Standing Orders on the one hand and many of the directions in *The Methodist Service Book* and *Entry into the Church 1991* on the other. Since these liturgical texts are unlikely to be reprinted it seems inappropriate for the Faith and Order Committee to propose a detailed list of amendments to them. A resolution (3) is therefore proposed which, if adopted, will make it clear that the provisions of the Deed of Union and Standing Orders must prevail wherever the directions in *The Methodist Service Book* and *Entry into the Church 1991* are inconsistent with those provisions.

Because the procedures for persons being received from other Christians communions from which straightforward transfer is not possible need particularly to be clarified, a further resolution (4) is proposed.’

The Conference adopted Resolution 2 in the following form:

- (i) for the existing Standing Order 803(2) substitute:
 - (2) Being thus satisfied the committee shall recommend such candidates, after not less than three months in training, to the Church Council for approval.
- (ii) for the existing Standing Order 804 substitute:
 - 804 Public Service.** (1) A public service of reception into membership and confirmation should be held at least once a year either for a Local Church or for a group of Local Churches.
 - (2) If any candidate approved by the Church Council is unavoidably absent from the public service of reception and confirmation the minister or other person in pastoral charge of the Local Church shall arrange for his or her reception and confirmation at a suitable time and place in the presence of members of the Local Church.

The Conference adopted as additional Resolution 3:

‘The Conference resolves that where the Directions in *The Methodist Service Book* and *Entry into the Church 1991* are inconsistent with the Deed of Union and Standing Orders as to membership of the Methodist Church and admission thereto, the provisions of the Deed of Union and of Standing Orders shall prevail.’

The Conference adopted as additional Resolution 4:

‘The Conference amends Direction 4 (*Methodist Service Book*, page A43) and Direction 28 (*Entry into the Church 1991*, page 4) as follows:

For the words ‘the Church Council shall admit them into full membership; and then, if pastoral reasons so require, they may’ substitute ‘the Church Council shall approve their admission into membership and they shall’.

3 THE LORD'S SUPPER

blank

(i) Presidency at the Lord's Supper

LAY PRESIDENCY AT THE LORD'S SUPPER (1984)

B. LAY PRESIDENCY AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. At the Conference of 1983 a Notice of Motion was tabled by a minister and a layman from the Liverpool District in the following terms:

Conference, recognising that the strong desire for a close link between pastor and celebrant, leads congregations served by lay ministers to desire their own pastor to officiate at Holy Communion, and believing this to be a right desire, asks the Faith and Order Committee to re-assess the criteria for granting dispensations to lay persons to preside at the Lord's Supper.

The Conference did not vote on the issue, but referred the whole matter, without prejudice, to the Faith and Order Committee for discussion and report (Daily Record No. 9 June 30th 1983).

2. The present arrangement is governed by S. O. 011. The Committee referred to in paragraph (3) of that S. O. is the Committee for Authorisations of Lay Persons to preside at the Lord's Supper. That committee simply applies the formula set out in paragraph (1) of the S. O., which reads as follow:

A circuit which considers that any of its churches is deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper through lack of ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan.

The Notice of Motion was sent to the Faith and Order Committee because it requested a change in the basic criteria, and therefore in S. O. 011 (1), and not simply a change in its application.

3. The formula in the S. O. is as old as Methodist Union. The original Deed of Union included a paragraph that dealt with the period of transition when circuits with different traditions would be amalgamating. The paragraph begins,

The general usage of the Churches or denominations whereby the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered by Ministers shall continue to be observed.

Some nine lines later we read, 'Where however it can be shown that any Church is deprived of a reasonably frequent and regular administration through lack of ministers the Circuit concerned may apply to the Conference for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to administer the Sacrament.' (Minutes 1932, p. 303.)

This particular paragraph was deleted from the Deed of Union when the period of transition was thought to be over, but the provision for the authorisation of lay persons has remained virtually unchanged.

4. When the statement, *Ordination in the Methodist Church*, was issued by the Conference of 1960, it carried an Appendix re-affirming the position set out in 1932. By a curious mischance it is not now clear whether the resolution of Conference covered the appendices as well as the statement; nevertheless, the summary presented in the appendix was an accurate account of the situation as it was then, and is now. The S. O. on procedure was re-affirmed in 1968. The matter was raised again in two memorials in the Conference of 1974, which were referred to the Faith and Order Committee. A comprehensive answer was made by the Committee and accepted by the Conference of 1975. This answer begins by drawing attention to a second statement on Ordination made in 1974, which gives reasons why it should normally be a minister who presides at Holy Communion. The answer then alludes to S. O. 011 and goes on to define 'deprivation', to urge ordained ministers to give greater priority to arranging services of Holy Communion, and to conclude that there should be, not a relaxing, but a tightening up in our practice of granting authorisations to lay people. Furthermore, the contention that pastoral charge should carry with it the right to preside is considered and rejected. The answer concludes with the words: The Conference holds that some degree of pastoral responsibility does not of itself constitute an entitlement to the administration of the Lord's Supper. It draws attention to the existing Standing Order 011 which provides for cases of deprivation.
5. In adopting this statement, the Conference asked for further attention to be given to the distinction between probationers and other lay people in the matter of authorisation, because at that time they were considered separately. Consequently by a statement of 1976 this distinction was removed.
6. A Notice of Motion in the 1978 Conference asked that the Faith and Order Committee and Stationing Committee should 'consider' the criteria for the granting of dispensations. This was done and the position taken in S. O. 011 was duly re-affirmed.
7. It is clear from this evidence that, though questions have occasionally been asked, the Conference has never wavered from the position taken at Methodist Union. Authorisations have always been regarded as a means of meeting a need that cannot be met by the work of ordained ministers. They have never been regarded as a right accorded to lay people in pastoral charge.
8. It is necessary to ask, therefore, whether any new factors have arisen that require a change in this established position. There are three, and they need to be considered separately.
9. In the first place, there is in some parts of the Methodist Church a far greater interest in and awareness of the service of Holy Communion as an expression of the Gospel and its fulness than pertained in 1932. Some congregations ask for weekly celebrations. This is a movement much to be encouraged. It does not, however, call for a change in Standing Orders. There is no rule about what is 'reasonably frequent and regular celebration' other than the very

general 'rule of thumb' by which the Committee for Authorisations operated in 1975. If a Church wishes for a weekly celebration and the exigencies of planning make only monthly celebration possible, then that Church may reasonably be said to be deprived. Provided a request is made in these terms, the Committee for Authorisations should, all other things being equal, accede to it. We believe it does so already.

10. The second new factor is the growing realisation that there is but one ministry expressed in a variety of ways and shared between ordained and lay. In the light of this realisation all lines of demarcation are being scrutinised afresh. We in Methodism have come to recognise that we have been slow in making demands upon and giving responsibility to our lay people, and that the reputation we enjoy in the Church at large for the employment of lay people is largely undeserved. We are now beginning to understand what collaborative ministry means.
11. The third factor concerns the growing need in missionary situations in this country. These are to be found in very different cultural areas, such as urban estates, new towns and the inner city, where christian presence is small. The situation from which the Notice of Motion arose was one of these areas. Methodism is at present unable, due to shortage of both finance and personnel, to maintain full-time ordained ministry in many of these areas, but the appointment of suitable lay people under S. O. 581 allows these areas of mission to be served.

Such lay people need to be recognised as representing and leading the Church in every respect.

12. Much of the argumentation for the Notice of Motion related to an individual case, but the request itself was for a general re-assessment of the criteria. The arguments, when generalised, appear like this:
 1. The celebration of Holy Communion relates closely to the pastoral and missionary aspects of the Church's life. This means that the question of who presides is more than a technicality; it is a matter of the proper expression of the whole life of the congregation.
 2. The presence of an ordained minister from another part of the circuit almost inevitably means the absence of the lay person in pastoral charge. So the link between celebration and pastoral care is lost.
 3. Where lay and ordained share together in full-time ministry in a circuit, it is important to demonstrate that the ministry of the lay assistant is not regarded as second best.
 4. The Methodist Church is not opposed in principle to the presidency of lay people at Holy Communion. The restriction is a matter of order and order ought not to be allowed to impoverish worship or inhibit mission.

The conclusion of this argument is that the criteria for the giving of authorisations should be modified so that a lay person with particular pastoral and missionary responsibility in a local Church should always have authorisation if it is requested. There is no suggestion that circuits or districts

should be allowed to decide the matter themselves, nor that the present system of application to a connexional committee should change.

13. The Faith and Order Committee recognises the weight of these arguments and is anxious that every possible step should be taken to strengthen the hand of those who are striving to advance worship, mission and pastoral care, as three integrated aspects of the Church's being. The Committee is not persuaded, however, that a radical departure in principle from our established position is the best way to do this. And there are dangers in accepting the full import of the Notice of Motion.
14. The Committee points out that the idea of collaborative ministry, in which ordained and lay persons share ministry together, does not imply the dissolution of the distinction between them; nor does it weaken the meaning of ordination. Ordination in the Methodist Church is authorisation to act as a person representative of the ministry of the whole Church. This includes a ministry of word and sacrament, and appropriately the presidency at the Eucharist. Lay people provide most of the preaching in Methodism, exercise most of the pastoral care and teaching, and fulfil a wide range of essential ministries, but this does not mean that they should also function as ordained ministers. There is no essential reason why a lay person should fulfil a function normally carried out by an ordained minister.
15. Secondly, the picture of the local congregation and its pastor celebrating the Lord's Supper is a stirring one, but there is the need to maintain a careful balance between the church as local congregation and the whole Church. Every service of Holy Communion is a celebration of the whole Church, and it is important that it should be so understood. This is one reason why presidency is linked with ordination. Certain people with a specific calling are designated by the Conference as representatives of the whole Church for this particular purpose. In this way the relationship between the local congregation and the whole Church is carefully maintained.
16. Thirdly, each congregation of the Methodist Church is part of a circuit. The ministers appointed to have pastoral charge of the several congregations and to conduct their worship are appointed in the first place to the circuit; one of the essential purposes of this polity is that the work of the ministry should bind together the several congregations in Christian fellowship. This principle applies equally to 'dispensations'. The authorisation granted by the Conference to a person not ordained as a presbyter to preside at the Holy Communion, empowers the recipient to do this throughout the specified circuit, and only there. It is granted to the person named, but it also constitutes an authorisation to the Superintendent to include that person among those whom he or she appoints on the Circuit Plan to preside at the Lord's Supper. This is one of the ways in which our Methodist pattern of working tries to express the universality of the whole Christian Church.
17. Fourthly, the immediate beneficiaries, if a re-assessment on the lines indicated were made, would be the lay assistants, referred to in paragraph 11. Many such serve the Church at present; many are local preachers; some become candidates for the ministry. Their service is invaluable, especially in a time of ministerial shortage. They remain, however, **assistants**. It is important that

their position be distinguished from that of ordained ministers. If it is not, if they are granted authorisations by virtue of their share in pastoral responsibility, there will be present in our midst two kinds of 'minister of word and sacraments'. On one hand there will be those who have been appointed by the Conference, ordained and granted all the rights and duties of being in Full Connexion. On the other, there will be those who have been appointed locally, who lack those rights and duties, and who will not have been presented to the Conference at all. There are great dangers in this situation, not least the danger of injustice towards those who will be giving much of the service required of an ordained minister without being one. The Methodist Church recognised these dangers when lay pastors were employed in the past, and took the necessary action. The Church must learn from this experience.

18. For these reasons, the Committee does not believe that a radical departure from the policy that has been operated in Methodism since Union is called for. But note must be taken of the points made in paragraphs 9 and 11 above. There are some situations where a lay person signally represents the Church in a particular area and has a position of leadership in worship and mission under S.O. 581. Even where there are sufficient ordained ministers in the circuit to maintain frequent communion, that area may have such a sense of identity, and the involvement of the lay person in the area may be so complete, that it may be reasonably said that the worship and witness of the community there would be seriously impeded if the lay person were unable to preside at Holy Communion. It is to be hoped that such circumstances are rare, for they imply a weakness in our circuit system, our stationing policy, our use of resources, or indeed in all three. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that such situations do exist and, while they exist, the Church must take whatever steps are necessary to meet them. The Conference, therefore, directs the Committee for Authorisations to consider, in conjunction with the Faith and Order Committee, ways of recognising situations such as those referred to here and in paragraph 11, and thereafter to recommend the granting of authorisations in such cases.

RESOLUTION

That the Conference adopt this report on Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper.

(Agenda 1984, pp.24-28)

THE GRANTING OF AUTHORISATIONS TO PRESIDE AT THE LORD'S SUPPER TO LAY PEOPLE IN 'MISSIONARY SITUATIONS' (1985)

The Conference of 1984 adopted a report from the Faith and Order Committee on Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper (DR No. 8 Item 23). That report discussed, among other things, the special needs of areas described as 'missionary situations in this country'. The Committee for Authorisations and the Faith and Order Committee were directed to consider ways of recognising such situations so that they could be treated appropriately in the Committee for Authorisations.

Missionary situations were described in the Faith and Order Report of 1984 as 'found in very different cultural areas, such as urban estates, new towns and the inner city, where Christian presence is small'. The Report says later: 'There are some situations where a lay person signally represents the Church in a particular area and has a position of leadership in worship and mission under S.O. 581. Even where there are sufficient ordained ministers in the circuit to maintain frequent communion, that area may have such a sense of identity, and the involvement of the lay person in the area may be so complete, that it may be reasonably said that the worship and witness of the community there would be seriously impeded if the lay person were unable to preside at Holy Communion'. (S.O. 581 concerns lay people employed in pastoral work).

The two committees recommend that the following criteria should be used:

1. The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and District support for such mission, and signs of growth.
2. The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.
3. The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the 'isolated area', living within it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.
4. It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement.

Reference to these criteria should be made in the application coming from the Synod to the Committee for Authorisations and so to the Conference.

RESOLUTION

That Conference adopt this report on the granting of authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper to lay people in 'missionary situations'.

(Agenda 1985, pp.627-628)

The Conference adopted the above resolution, adding:

'and in case these latest criteria should become regarded as the only ones, directs the Committee to bring all the criteria together and present them to the Conference of 1986.'

THE GRANTING OF AUTHORISATIONS TO PRESIDE AT THE LORD'S SUPPER TO PERSONS OTHER THAN MINISTERS (1986)

The Conference of 1985 (Daily Record p.24) instructed the Faith & Order Committee to bring together all the criteria used in judging a request for a person other than a minister to preside at the Lord's Supper under S.O. 011. Three criteria must be borne in mind. Reference to one or more of these criteria, together with a copy of the plan and supporting evidence, should be made in the application from the Synod to the Committee for Authorisations.

1. Basic Deprivation

Standing Order 011 defines the procedures by which any Circuit believing itself to be 'deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper through lack of ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan'.

The definition of the word 'deprivation' is found in the Faith & Order Report to Conference of 1975.

'The present practice of the Committee on Lay Authorisations, which acts for the Secretary of Conference in the matter, working on a rule of thumb that a church should have a monthly Lord's Supper if so desired, is to divide the number of churches in a circuit by the number of ministers and after taking into account the mobility of ministers, the size of the churches, the availability of supernumeraries, sector ministers and other ministers without pastoral charge and the number of churches with less than two services per Sunday, if the result is five or more to agree that a condition of deprivation exists'.

The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1976 makes it clear that probationers are to be treated like other unordained persons, although the Committee for Lay Authorisations normally considers that the stationing of a Probationer in an ordained minister's appointment is prima facie evidence for a situation of deprivation.

2. Desire for more frequent Holy Communion

The Faith & Order Committee Report to Conference of 1984 admitted the possibility of far greater interest in and awareness of the service of Holy Communion in some parts of the Methodist Church.

'If a Church wishes for a weekly celebration and the exigencies of planning make only monthly celebration possible, then that Church may reasonably be said to be deprived. Provided a request is made in these terms the Committee for Authorisation should, all things being equal, accede to it.'

3. Missionary Situations

The 1984 Report recognised the growing need in missionary situations.

‘Even where there are sufficient ordained ministers in the circuit to maintain frequent Communion, that area may have such a sense of identity, and the involvement of the lay person may be so complete, that it may be reasonably said that the worship and witness of the community there would be seriously impeded if the lay person were unable to preside at Holy Communion.’

The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 recommended the following criteria to be applied in relation to ‘missionary situations’.

1. The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and District support for such a mission, and signs of growth.
2. The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.
3. The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the ‘isolated area’, living within it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.
4. It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement.

Background documents

1. Standing Order 011
2. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1975 (Agenda pp.253-256)
3. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1976 (Agenda pp.294-295 and Resolution 2, pp.298-300)
4. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1984 (Agenda pp.24-28)
5. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 (Agenda pp.627-628)

APPENDIX

CRITERIA ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON LAY AUTHORISATIONS IN CALCULATING DEPRIVATION

In attempting to interpret the definition of basic deprivation contained in the Faith & Order report, the Committee on Lay Authorisation has the difficult task of taking into account many factors. Some can be quantified, others cannot. The extent of the influence of the latter has to rest on the experience and judgement of the

members of the Committee, whose recommendation is, of course, subject to the judgement of Conference.

The following 'guidelines' help the Committee in reaching a judgement on basic deprivation as defined in section 1 of the Faith and Order report.

1. The number of churches is calculated on the assumption that a church has two services. If a considerable number of churches in a circuit have one service per week the number of churches is reduced for the purposes of any calculation. No mathematical formula can be offered, times of services and the number of one service churches have to be borne in mind in arriving at an agreed number of churches figure.
2. The number of ministers is calculated by adding to the number of ministers stationed other ministerial help available. The Committee takes into account evidence of assistance being offered by supernumerary ministers, ministers in other appointments and ministers without pastoral charge. For example, an active supernumerary, with transport, who conducts 13 services a quarter, might be counted as half a minister for the purpose of this calculation.
3. The number of churches is divided by the number of ministers and if the result is five or more a situation of deprivation is deemed to exist.
4. If the result of the calculation is less than five but close to it the Committee takes into consideration the following factors which cannot easily be quantified.
 - (a) A circuit which is widespread and where there is evidence of travel problems.
 - (b) The personal circumstances of individual ministers (eg. transport available and health).
 - (c) The relative sizes of churches, bearing in mind that a minister is likely to want to conduct more services in a large church than in a lot of smaller churches.
 - (d) Other relevant evidence offered in the submission by the Synod.
5. Similar criteria to the above are used when an application is received in an emergency under S.O. 011 (7).
6. When application for a renewal is received under S.O. 011 (5), evidence is sought of the frequency with which a person, who has received an authorisation previously, has conducted the Lord's Supper.

RESOLUTION

That the Conference notes the criteria previously adopted and also notes the ways in which they are applied.

(Agenda 1986, pp.665-668)

THE SUNDAY SERVICE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (1990)

- 01 Part of the Faith and Order Committee's report to the Conference of 1987 was as follows :

The range and variety of enquiries from ministers and others seeking the advice of the Committee has been as wide as ever. A persistent enquiry has related to what it means to preside at the Lord's Supper. After considerable debate the Committee offers as a minimum definition of 'Presidency' the saying by the ordained minister of the whole of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

The Conference approved this definition by adopting Resolution 3 (*Agenda*, 1987, p.648)

- 02 The Conference of 1988 received the following Memorial (M.15) :

The Birmingham (West) (5/6) Circuit Meeting (Present: 58. Vote 57 for, 1 against) wishes to express its concern at the implications of Resolution 3 of the Faith and Order Report, passed at the 1987 Conference. The concern of this Circuit Meeting is with the words: ". . . the Committee offers as a minimum definition of 'Presidency' the saying by the ordained minister of the whole of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving." The practice in some churches of this Circuit, as elsewhere, is that lay people assist with Communion, and that this sometimes includes their saying part of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. (The words of Institution are reserved for the Minister.) This Circuit Meeting believes that this is an important practice in our churches and regrets not only the decision of the 1987 Conference, but also the way it was dealt with in four lines at the end of a long report.

This Circuit Meeting therefore requests the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to reconsider this matter and to report to the Conference of 1989.

The Conference replied :

In the light of a number of enquiries concerning what constitutes Presidency at the Lord's Supper, the Faith and Order Committee proposed to the Conference of 1987, after study of rubrics of the Methodist Service Book, as a **minimum** definition of Presidency, the saying by the ordained minister of the whole of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. The matter was referred to briefly in the general section of the Faith and Order Committee's report. It did not, however, come "at the end of a long report". The Conference had the opportunity to express its mind.

It is in the light of the growing practice in many circuits of dividing up the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving amongst two or three voices that the question was first raised with the Faith and Order Committee concerning what constitutes Presidency, usually because the division of the prayer was

a source of controversy. Some circuits, like the Birmingham (West) Circuit Meeting, insisted none the less on the words of institution being “reserved for the minister”. This latter insistence implies that the saying of these words is a minimum definition of Presidency.

Because fuller consideration is desirable, the Conference refers the question again to the Faith and Order Committee for clarification and report to the Conference of 1989.

03 The Context of the Discussion

Two factors underlie our recent discussion of what constitutes presidency at the Lord’s Supper. One is related to the problem, now largely settled¹, of probationer ministers without dispensations. If such probationers were to share in the leadership of worship when the Lord’s Supper was celebrated, it was clear that an ordained minister must be present. What was not clear to everyone was what the ordained minister must do, if anything, actually to be presiding. Was his or her presence in the congregation sufficient? Or must he or she say certain words or perform certain actions? If the latter, what words must the presiding minister say or what actions must he or she perform? The **minimum** definition of presidency, adopted by the 1987 Conference, answered those questions, though not everyone is happy with the answer.

04 The second factor informing this discussion is the practice in some churches of dividing up the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving amongst two or three voices, presumably to encourage congregational participation. The effect of the 1987 minimum definition is to discourage this practice. That is why the Birmingham (West) Circuit Meeting has asked the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to give further attention to the matter.

05 The context of the discussion has been described at this point because it is important to know why we are addressing such a question. Arguments about minimum definitions of presidency at the Lord’s Supper do not come naturally to Methodists, and it should be understood that the Faith and Order Committee offered a minimum definition, which the Conference accepted, not as an abstract theological exercise but in response to perceived practical uncertainties. Our natural instincts would not lead us to consider such a question; but circumstances have demanded that we should. Our instincts may well be right, however, in warning us that minimum definitions are not the best of starting points for any worthwhile exploration of the meaning and practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Minimum definitions smack of petty legalism, while the Lord’s Supper is about grace and mercy and life. The question has been asked, and must be addressed; but it is by no means the most important question that can be asked about the Lord’s Supper. We turn, therefore, first to a brief consideration of *The Sunday Service* and in particular of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

06 The Sunday Service

The Sunday Service is authorized by the Conference and fulfills a normative role in Methodist worship. This is not to say that other forms of worship are deficient or inferior, but rather to emphasize that worship in its fullness includes both Word and Sacrament. One of the fruits of the Liturgical

movement has been a widespread recognition of this truth, which has led to heightened awareness of the importance of the Ministry of the Word in branches of the Church where the Word had previously been undervalued, and of the significance of the Lord's Supper in other sections of the Church where this sacrament had been somewhat neglected.

07 *The Sunday Service* celebrates the Gospel both by word and by sign. The Scriptures are read, expounded and applied to the congregation; the Good News is then portrayed by acted sign in remembrance of our Lord. In the Lord's Supper *The Sunday Service*, like other eucharistic rites, reflects dramatically the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper : **taking, thanking, breaking, giving**. This 'Four Action Shape' is a dramatic representation of the scene in the Upper Room, though of course the service as a whole, and the Great Prayer in particular, recalls not only the Last Supper but the whole salvation history.

08 **The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The use of the word 'Eucharist' (*eucharistia*, 'thanksgiving') for the Lord's Supper dates from the early second century and is eloquent testimony to the centrality of thanksgiving within the service from the earliest days. The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving which we find in *The Sunday Service* has an exceedingly long history, not of course in its precise wording, but in its structure and themes. Liturgical scholarship has revealed that, from the earliest known sources onwards, Great Prayers have included a *preface*, recalling God's mighty acts in creation and redemption; the *Words of Institution*; *anamnesis* (memorial); *epiclesis* (invocation of the Spirit); together with the familiar introductory dialogue ('*Lift up your hearts*'), the *Sanctus* ('Holy, holy, holy Lord') and the *Benedictus qui venit* ('Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord') and a concluding doxology. Not every known rite contains every one of these features; but there is a remarkable degree of consistency. Our own Great Prayer, then, is only in part a modern composition and it has not been put together haphazardly: it belongs to a long succession. Though it differs in wording from other Great Prayers, its component parts and general structure are the same. In worship, as in much of the Christian life, there is a large element of what is 'given', to be received humbly and gratefully from those who have preceded us in the Christian way. The basic form of the Great Prayer is one such gift.

09 The Great Prayer, then, has a recognizable and venerable form. It also possesses an inherent unity. No single part of it is intrinsically more precious or important than the rest. Some Christians have believed that the Words of Institution alone effect the consecration of the bread and wine so that they become for the communicants the body and blood of Christ. Methodists have never been committed to any such understanding; it has not been our belief that the recitation of a formula effects consecration; and it is significant that theologians of other communions are nowadays disinclined to identify 'the moment of consecration' in so precise a way. The Roman Catholic liturgist, Ambrosius Verheul, for example, has recently argued that the entire Great Prayer has consecratory force and was understood in this way by Justin, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Augustine, and many other patristic writers.⁷ Against this background, it is strange to find some Methodists, who favour the leading

of the Great Prayer by more than one person, insisting that the Words of Institution be reserved for the ordained minister.

10 Arguments for a change in our practice

We now consider the arguments that can be advanced against the minimum definition of presidency approved by the Conference of 1987, and in favour of allowing several people to lead parts of the Great Prayer.

- 11 1. Under the influence of the Liturgical Movement, lay participation in Methodist worship has greatly increased. We have been guided away from the notion that worship is a kind of performance put on by one person, the preacher, while the congregation sits and observes. Worship is the offering of the whole congregation, and it is therefore right that, in addition to the corporate singing of hymns and saying of prayers, individuals or groups as well as the leader of worship should play active roles. In many churches, members of the congregation now regularly read lessons and lead prayers. In general, this trend is surely to be welcomed and indeed it is encouraged in *The Sunday Service*. General Direction 7, while insisting that an ordained minister, or a person with a dispensation, shall preside at the Lord's Supper, nevertheless permits active participation by others: "Laymen may be invited to share in the Preparation; the Ministry of the Word, including the intercessions; and in the distribution of the bread and wine."
- 12 It is not difficult to see how, in some churches, this principle has been extended to the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving; and those who have thus gone beyond the provisions of General Direction 7 have no doubt done so with the intention of actively involving lay people at a highly significant part of the service.
- 13 It must be said, however, that the desire, praiseworthy in itself, to maximize congregational participation, cannot be regarded as sufficient justification for the practice we are considering. First, it must not be forgotten that lay people already have an opportunity for active involvement in the Great Prayer: the whole congregation is involved in the introductory dialogue, and says the *Sanctus*, the *Benedictus qui venit*, the acclamations, and the doxology. It is simply not the case that lay people are denied active participation in the prayer. Second, the fact that the whole congregation and not just the minister offers worship does not mean that everyone can, or should, do everything. If the choir sings an anthem, this should be regarded not as a performance for the congregation's benefit but as an offering to God – an offering, moreover, which all the congregation can present; but not all will actually sing it. Again, preaching has an integral place in worship; but preaching is an activity which involves one person in speaking while others listen and respond to the Gospel which is proclaimed. The support of the congregation is a crucial element here: it endorses the word of the preacher as well as being challenged by it. But preacher and congregation fulfill different, though complementary, roles.
- 14 It is the Committee's belief that, if General Direction 7 is taken seriously and applied regularly, there is already ample opportunity for lay participation in *The Sunday Service*, including corporate participation in the Great Prayer. The argument from participation could only be applied to the leadership of that

prayer if it were supported by other, stronger, arguments and if there were no sufficiently weighty arguments against it.

- 15 2. Some Methodists feel a general unease about any kind of 'rigidity' in relation to worship. The freedom of the Spirit, it is said, replaces all forms of legalism. Nothing should be absolutely required. Thus the Conference ought not to require that the Great Prayer be said by the president. It is easy to see why this argument should be attractive, and why apparently legalistic rubrics or directions should be regarded as Spirit-quenching. But this argument is dangerous. If nothing is absolutely required, then, true enough, it is not required that an ordained minister or someone otherwise authorized should lead the Great Prayer. But the argument need not stop there. If nothing is absolutely required, it is not required that there should be a Great Prayer at all; or even that we should celebrate the Lord's Supper; or that we should believe this or that doctrine in order to call our belief Christian. The Spirit blows where he will. It is, of course, inconceivable that anyone should want to push this argument so far; yet any use of the argument requires an entirely subjective judgment from the user as to the point at which to cease pushing it. What is bound to happen in practice is that we invoke the freedom of the Spirit as justification for disregarding customs that we dislike and for adopting practices that we favour.
- 16 Moreover, the argument rests upon a one-sided doctrine of the Spirit. It has been the Church's experience that the Spirit works through both tradition and spontaneity. The ministry of the Wesleys testifies to that truth, and the growth of Methodism in the eighteenth century owes much to the balance that was preserved between traditional forms and new initiatives. Without any kind of spontaneity tradition soon becomes dull and dead. Without tradition spontaneity soon becomes shallow and superficial. Our Christian privilege is to receive the gift of the Spirit both in the depth and clarity of traditional forms and in the joy of immediate experience. To have a form does not inevitably result in formality.
- 17 3. Another argument springs from a desire not to separate the minister from the congregation, or, to put it more negatively, not to allow the minister to set himself or herself apart from the congregation. Why should ministers and others with dispensations appropriate to themselves tasks which might be shared with others? Why does the Conference, indeed, require them to do so? This concern reflects, perhaps, a conscious or unconscious fear of 'clericalism'. It can be answered in two ways. First, we need to take seriously what was said in paragraph 13 above. Of course all Christians are called by God. Of course all Christians are called to worship. But not all are called to the same ministry within the Church or within its worship. We rightly rebuke those misinformed critics who allege that in Methodist churches "anyone can stand up and preach". That is simply not true. Preachers are called by God, and trained and commissioned by his Church. The vast majority of worshippers are not called to preach, or trained and commissioned to preach, so they do not preach. Similarly, not all are called or ordained to the ministry of the sacraments. Not everyone can do everything, for we do not all have the same calling.

18 Second, we need to be clear that this is not a matter of ‘clerical’ presumption. In paragraph 19 below, we shall focus on the president as the representative of Christ, the host, at his feast. To some people, this notion smacks of arrogance: how can anyone claim to perform such a function? But the question rests upon a misunderstanding. It is not a matter of a human being presuming. It is rather that God calls, a person responds to that call, and the Church appoints him or her to the task. The same is true of preaching, as we have already observed. We do well to resist ‘clericalism’; equally, we do well to resist any undervaluation of God’s calling of some women and some men to the ministry of the word and sacraments within the total ministry of Christ’s Church.

19 Arguments against a change in our practice.

1. As we have noted above, the Lord’s Supper can be regarded as an acted sign, a dramatic representation of salvation history. It recapitulates the scene in the Upper Room by doing, in remembrance of Jesus, what Christians have done since the earliest days of the Church, from whose understanding of these events the first accounts of that scene are derived. In this dramatic recapitulation, the believers are gathered together. A president, representing our Lord himself, takes the bread and wine, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread, and distributes the bread and wine to the assembled company who eat and drink. This dramatic symbolism must be preserved; it links us with our fellow Christians across the modern world and across the Christian centuries and ultimately with Christ and his disciples in the Upper Room. Awesome as the thought is, one person alone can properly represent our Lord. In the Upper Room Jesus is with his disciples but yet stands over against them. He is the host; they are the guests. By a miracle of grace, the host is also the servant. It is the privilege of one person, the president, to represent the divine host, and servant, at each celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Any other practice mars the powerful dramatic symbolism of the service.

20 It is, of course, true that in some branches of the Church concelebrations occur from time to time, when a number of ordained people say all or part of the Great Prayer together. Such concelebrations have never been a feature of Methodist worship and they depend upon an understanding of ordination, and its implications for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, that differs from our own. Methodists do, however, encounter concelebrations in certain ecumenical contexts, usually when this practice is employed to validate the rite in the eyes of fellow Christians who have scruples about non-episcopal ordination. In these circumstances, concelebration must be regarded as a device for enabling intercommunion to occur and as an expedient for coping with one aspect of our present unhappy divisions. It does not in any way detract from the principle that ideally one person alone should represent Christ the host at the Lord’s Supper; nor, since those involved are invariably ordained, does it have any bearing upon our present concern.

21 2. As we have already suggested, questions about validity and the moment of consecration do not come naturally to Methodist minds, and the Faith and Order Committee does not regard it as desirable that they should. The entire drama is the consecration and guarantees the validity. But the more the president’s part in the service is reduced and the weaker the representative symbolism becomes, the more people will be inclined to look for particular

elements within the service that will guarantee its identity. That is why some people insist that, while others may lead parts of the prayer, the president must say the Words of Institution. We have observed that the isolation of these words from the rest of the Great Prayer is theologically undesirable. But such an isolation is actively encouraged by any reduction of the President's part of the the Great Prayer. It is worthy of note that the Faith and Order Committee regularly receives comments and requests for advice, not only from those who favour more lay participation at this point, but in much greater numbers from people who are anxious about the involvement of lay people in the distribution of the bread and wine and the saying, by these lay people, of the words that accompany the distribution. These latter practices can be justified; but what is already a significant anxiety will undoubtedly be made worse if people other than the president lead parts of the Great Prayer. The effect will be to drive us into the kind of discussions about consecration and validity from which other branches of the Church have, to a large extent, moved on.

- 22 3. 'The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ'.³ This claim imposes upon us a responsibility to think both historically and ecumenically. From the beginning, the drama of the Lord's Supper has been represented with a single person presiding and saying the Great Prayer. Tradition cannot, of course, provide an absolute authority for Methodism. Sometimes in the course of history departures from the norm take place which can soon be recognized as the work of the Spirit. When that happens, and in many ways it did at the birth of Methodism, those involved have a duty to prize and preserve their experience and not to surrender it for the sake of conformity and tradition. The Church is refreshed with living water; it is not a stagnant pool. But this is not to say that every departure from tradition is unreservedly to be welcomed as the work of the Spirit, or that every Methodist deviation from the ecumenical norm should be considered part of our essential witness. Tradition is not invariably right, but it should not be treated lightly. In the case that we are considering, the weight of tradition is heavily in favour of the leading of the Great Prayer by the president alone. This should be regarded as a powerful indication that our present policy is correct, unless equally weighty and convincing arguments can be adduced against it.
- 23 4. The report of the Worship Commission, presented to the 1988 Conference, rightly draws attention to the importance of aesthetic considerations in worship.⁴ There can be no doubt that the power and beauty of music and words, among other media, can greatly enhance the quality of our services. The opposite, of course, is also true. Structure and form are also significant, though they should not be obtrusive; and we do well to take into account the structure and form of the Great Prayer. It is written as a recital into which congregational affirmations are inserted. One person leads; the rest burst in with acclamations and carry the prayer on to its final doxology and thunderous 'Amen'. Something similar used to happen in our chapels in earlier days and, happily, is still to be found in less formal worship today. The leader prays deliberately; others break in with 'Praise the Lord' and 'Hallelujah'. It is not idle, either, to recall the cheer-leader at a football match, or when 'three cheers' are called for at a celebration, or when a toast is proposed. One leads; the gathered company responds. In all these circumstances there is an

atmosphere of celebration and exultation, as indeed there should be during the Great Prayer. The form is highly effective; it cannot be improved by dividing up the recital for a number of voices.

24 5. *The Sunday Service* clearly indicates which parts of the service are basic to it and which parts may be omitted. This allows for desirable variation, such as the use of more penitential material during Lent and more overtly joyful elements at festivals. There is plenty of scope for flexibility when the service is varied in this way. But some elements **are** basic, and of great importance among them is the Great Prayer. The effect of making changes at this crucial point is bound to be a general inference that **all** things are variable, and this would immeasurably damage the sacramental life of Methodism. Once again, we need to preserve a proper balance between form and freedom, between tradition and spontaneity. We need to know what is given and what is variable.

25 6. What the Conference of 1987 adopted was a **minimum** definition of presidency. Because this minimum definition has been challenged, the present report has sought to clarify and evaluate the arguments for it and against it. But, if upheld, it remains a minimum definition. It is the Committee's view that to preside at the Lord's Supper, or indeed any act of worship, is to be visibly and unmistakably the one who leads the service. On this basis, there is a great deal to be said for the president beginning and ending the whole act of worship; and he or she should take responsibility for the key elements of the service. In the case of the Lord's Supper, this will certainly include the saying of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving – but that should not be taken to mean that it is desirable for the president to lead the Great Prayer and to take no other leading role in the service. What is important is that the person presiding should be seen to be presiding.

26 **Conclusion**

The Faith and Order Committee believes that the arguments in favour of upholding the minimum definition adopted by the Conference of 1987 are more cogent and compelling than the arguments against. The Committee therefore recommends that the Conference, by adopting this report, confirm the judgment of the 1987 Conference.

27 Nevertheless, the Committee is persuaded that active participation in worship, both by the entire gathered company and by individuals and groups within it, is highly desirable. The president should lead the Great Prayer, fulfilling a vital symbolic role, and should further exercise a leading role throughout the service. But he or she need not and should not do everything. Despite the great advances that have been made in many places, it is very regrettable that in many of our celebrations of the Lord's Supper lay people have not been given the opportunity to exercise any functions at all. Lay people should be given ample opportunity, as General Direction 7 permits, to administer, to lead intercessions, to read lessons, to preach. Of necessity, this report has emphasized the president's role. But the whole congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper.

References

1. The Conference of 1988 adopted the report of the President's Council on Presidency at the Lord's Supper, which effectively dealt with the matter of probationers without dispensations.
2. *Studia Liturgica*, Volume 17 (1987), pp. 221-231.
3. *Deed of Union*, Clause 30.
4. *Agenda* (1988), pp. 164-167.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts the report on the Sunday Service – Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

(Agenda 1990, pp.106-114)

The Conference adopted the above resolution, adding:

“as its reply to Memorial M15 of 1998, but adopting the following as the minimum definition of presiding in place of that in the report:

‘the representative person who is authorised to preside in the Church gathered for worship and who on their behalf leads the actions of the Supper – principally giving thanks and sharing’.”

LAY AUTHORISATION (1994)

Introduction

1. The 1992 Conference received the following Suggestion (52(S)):

The Southampton Synod (R) (Present 232. Vote: 185 for, 47 against) suggests that the first paragraph of SO 011 be amended to read: "A Circuit which considers that (*any of its churches*) SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF A CHURCH'S MEMBERSHIP OR OF CHRISTIANS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY are deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (*through lack of ordained ministers*) may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or, on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent."

For the sake of clarity, it should be mentioned that, in the Suggestion, words in upper case letters are proposed for inclusion, while words preceded and followed by asterisks are proposed for deletion.

2. The Conference referred this Suggestion to the General Purposes Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, for consideration and report to the Conference of 1993. The Committees were unable to agree upon the terms of a report in time for the 1993 Conference and were given leave to report to the Conference of 1994.
3. The 1993 Conference received the following Memorial (M52):

The Cornwall Synod (R) (Present 180. Vote 114 for, 58 against, 8 neutral) sends the following Memorial to Conference:

"All Lay Workers appointed under SO 581(1) to pastoral and/or evangelistic work, and who are Fully Accredited Local Preachers, may have a dispensation to administer the sacraments whilst so appointed, if so commended by their Circuit Meeting."
4. The Conference referred this Memorial to the General Purposes Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, for consideration and report to the Conference of 1994.
5. This report, which presents replies to the 1992 Suggestion and the 1993 Memorial, was drafted by a joint Working Party. It was assisted in its work by explanatory material from the Southampton District and the Cornwall District and by the response of 25 District Chairmen to a questionnaire about the number of requests for lay authorisations and the context of those requests.
6. It is hoped that, as well as fulfilling the obligation to present replies to the two Districts, this report will also encourage ongoing discussion throughout the Connexion about the issues raised within it.

Context

7. One of the most significant developments in Methodist worship and spirituality in the last twenty to thirty years has been the growing awareness and appreciation of the Lord's Supper, accompanied by more frequent celebrations of it in many churches. The Committees which have prepared this report rejoice in that development and believe that the subject of lay authorisation should be discussed in the context of our understanding of the Holy Communion and in particular what it means to be a 'eucharistic community'. "We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread." (I Cor. 10:17). In and through this sacrament, God in Christ unites us to each other and himself. Discussion about who may preside and with whose authorisation is important; but it is important chiefly because of the importance of the Lord's Supper itself.
8. The context of the present discussion also includes the changes that have been taking place in society, for example, there are more elderly, housebound people, there is more residential accommodation for the elderly, an urgent missionary challenge is increasingly felt in new or older housing estates and in the inner cities.

The position since 1932

9. At Methodist Union an attempt was made to accommodate the divergent traditions of the uniting churches in respect of presidency by persons not ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Initially each church was able to follow its pre-Union practice, but in 1946 the Conference resolved that a common policy for the whole Connexion should be adopted. That policy – that ordained (presbyteral) ministers should normally preside but that named persons other than ordained ministers may be authorised by the Conference to preside in named Circuits – has broadly speaking remained the same for nearly fifty years. Standing Order 011 reads:

A Circuit which considers that any of its churches are deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper through lack of ordained ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent.
10. Numerous reports on the subject of lay authorisation have come to the Conference since 1946, sometimes in response to Suggestions and Memorials. Conferences at which this happened include those of 1960, 1968, 1975, 1976, 1979, 1984, 1985 and 1986. On each occasion, the Conference has explicitly or implicitly affirmed the principle enshrined in the current S.O. 011. It must be admitted, however, that there have been many expressions of disquiet, though for widely differing reasons. We mention five:
11. First, there are those who are in principle happy with S.O. 011 but who feel that its application has not always been just. Many of the Suggestions and Memorials which have been received on the subject have come from Circuits or Districts from which an application has not been granted and where a sense of grievance is felt.

12. Second, there is evidence that lay authorisations, including authorisations to probationer ministers, can cause difficulty in local ecumenical projects, especially those involving Anglicans. At the same time, rather different difficulties occur with the United Reformed Church, where lay authorisation, it is said, is more readily available. For example, a Methodist Lay Worker, having no Methodist authorisation, was given an authorisation to preside in a local United Reformed Church.
13. Third, there are within the Connexion those who believe that there should be no exceptions and that the person presiding at the Lord's Supper should invariably be an ordained presbyter.
14. Fourth, the opposite view is taken by those who regard the possibility of lay administration as an important principle to be preserved among us and who would like to see lay authorisations granted more readily by the Conference. Some, indeed, would prefer the authorising body to be the Circuit Meeting rather than the Conference.
15. Fifth, there are those who feel that S.O. 011 is unduly restrictive in focussing entirely upon 'deprivation' as the ground for authorisation and upon the worship of the local church as the only context in which deprivation might be experienced.
16. It is clearly impossible to devise a Standing Order that would seem satisfactory to holders of all the views set out above. The question remains, however, whether the existing Standing Order is the best that can be devised or whether it could be changed for the better.

Suggestion 52(S)

17. Suggestion 52(S) does not seek to move the Church away from the long-established understandings (1) that ordained presbyters should normally preside at the Lord's Supper; (2) that authorisations for others to preside should be granted only on grounds of 'deprivation' and (3) that such authorisations are given by the Conference itself to named individuals in named circuits for a limited period.
18. The Suggestion does, however, seek to extend the purposes for which authorisations might be granted. Supporting material from the Southampton District makes it clear that the principal concern that prompted the Suggestion was not local churches deprived of regular Sunday celebrations (the issue which S.O. 011 addresses) but the needs of sick or housebound people in their own homes, in elderly persons' homes, or in hospital. In some areas, it is very difficult for ministers to meet the sacramental needs of all the sick, elderly and housebound. Papers from both the Southampton District and the Cornwall District refer to new opportunities for mission and ministry and the need for Standing Orders that will consistently address these new situations.

Recommendations

19. The General Purposes and Faith and Order Committees make two recommendations. The first is that the Connexion should make use of the

possibilities presently available to assist in meeting the needs described in paragraph 18.

20. In 1984, the Conference adopted a report, **Extending Communion**, written by the Faith and Order Committee. It appears from other correspondence and from the supporting material from the Southampton District that that report's recommendations are not widely known. This is to be regretted because, in the judgement of the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, those recommendations provide an excellent way of addressing much of the concern which underlies the Suggestion.
21. 'Extended Communion' is a very ancient practice, which goes back at least to the time of Justin Martyr (about 150 AD). Following a celebration of the Lord's Supper in church, some of the remaining elements are taken to the homes of the housebound or sick by the minister or some other appointed person.
22. It is entirely proper for persons other than ordained ministers to take the elements into the homes of those who have been unable to join in the celebration in church, though of course ministers themselves can do this too. It may well be that, in some circuits where there is a heavy demand for home communion, the burden which falls on ministers could be lightened by ministers themselves practising 'Extended Communion' and/or sharing that privilege with others.
23. There has been some criticism of 'Extended Communion' by those who fear the introduction of the reservation of the Sacrament for the purposes of veneration. In reply, it may be said that Methodist spirituality is unlikely to be responsive to such veneration, even if there were any suggestion of its introduction, which there is not. 'Extended Communion' is pastorally most appropriate when the elements are taken out immediately or very shortly after the service in church. (Weekday Communion may sometimes provide the best opportunities for this). As its name suggests, the practice has to do with extending the celebration in church to members of the 'eucharistic community' who have not been able to be present. It has nothing whatever to do with the reservation of bread and wine for veneration.
24. Many testimonies have been received to the effect that the practice of 'Extended Communion' is pastorally beneficial, helping to strengthen housebound members' sense of identity with the worshipping community to which they belong but from which they have been physically separated.
25. So, under our present arrangements, people at home, in elderly persons' homes or in hospital could receive a sacramental ministry in the following ways:
 - a) An ordained minister could preside at a full service in the home or hospital.
 - b) An ordained minister or a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order could bring the elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.

- c) A person with an authorisation to preside within a circuit could, with the Superintendent's permission, preside at a full service in the home or hospital.
 - d) A person with an authorisation to preside within a circuit could bring elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.
 - e) Any person appointed by the Church Council and present at the service could bring elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.
26. Our existing procedures could, therefore, be employed to help to meet the needs suggested by Suggestion 52(S). The Committees presenting this report invite the Conference to re-affirm the principle of 'Extended Communion' as it did in adopting the 1984 report. A resolution to this effect follows.
27. An increase in 'Extended Communion' may well be a satisfactory solution to the problem of deprivation in homes or hospitals in some places, but it will not be the answer everywhere. For this reason, and for others, the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee make their second recommendation.
28. In the light of changing patterns of ministry and mission, and the wide variety of views regarding lay authorisations, and, seeking to discover how the Church's sacramental needs at the present time may be met, the General Purposes and Faith and Order Committees recommend that the Conference should invite churches, circuits and districts to discuss the issues raised in this report and to send comments to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee by the end of December 1995, so that a further report may be brought to the Conference of 1996.
29. There are several reasons for this recommendation. One was mentioned in paragraph 27. Another is the complexity of the issues involved, most of which go beyond the brief of the Working Party set up by General Purposes and Faith and Order to draft a reply to Suggestion 52(S). For example, patterns of ministry, lay and ordained, are changing. One District Chairman has described a circuit currently staffed by three itinerant ministers. He envisages that in twenty years' time, the same circuit will have one full-time itinerant minister and seven or eight Ministers in Local Appointments or Lay Workers. That vision may or may not prove to be correct, but it is certainly true that the once familiar pattern has changed already and will change further.
30. A third reason is the wide variety of views held among us regarding lay authorisations (see paragraphs 11-15) and therefore the desirability of wider discussion of the questions posed in the following paragraphs before any change to Standing Order 011 is proposed.

Questions

31. Among the questions which need to be considered are the following. **Are our existing procedures adequate to meet the eucharistic needs of a Church in which the Lord's Supper is increasingly valued and in which patterns of lay and ordained ministry are continuing to change and develop?**

32. **Is the way in which S.O. 011 is applied in practice satisfactory?** Appendix A to this report reproduces from the 1986 Agenda the Criteria adopted by the Committee on Lay Authorisations in calculating deprivation. Appendix B supplies an extract from the Faith and Order Committee's 1985 report to the Conference on lay authorisations in "missionary situations", which the Committee on Lay Authorisations takes into account in evaluating applications.
33. S.O. 011 regards 'deprivation' as the only acceptable ground for application for lay authorisation, and for this reason that Standing Order has a rather negative tone. **Is it possible or desirable to frame a Standing Order in more positive terms? Are there positive rather than negative reasons for the granting of lay authorisations?**

Memorial M52 (1993)

34. This report recommends that no change be made to Standing Order 011 at the present time, but also recommends that Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches be invited to discuss the issues raised in this report and to send their comments to the Faith and Order Committee.
35. If the Conference approves those recommendations, it would clearly be inappropriate, at the start of a period of discussion, to amend Standing Orders as would be required if the Conference wished to adopt the principle proposed by Memorial M52. But there are further reasons why, in the judgment of the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, the Cornwall District's Memorial should not be adopted.
36. First, as we have seen, the long-established usage of Methodism is that ordained (presbyteral) ministers should normally preside at the Lord's Supper. Lay authorisations have been regarded as exceptional. Memorial M52 envisages much more widespread lay authorisation – a significant departure from our usage for which there is no evidence of widespread support among Lay Workers themselves, or generally in the Connexion. Indeed the Cornwall Synod was far from unanimous in recommending this course, as the voting figures show.
37. Second, our usage is that named persons other than ordained ministers may be authorised by the Conference to preside in named Circuits and for a stated period of time. The connexional principle enshrined in this usage is of the utmost importance. Every person who presides at the Lord's Supper in our Connexion is connexionally authorised to do so in one way or another – presbyteral ministers by virtue of their ordination (which the Conference authorised); presbyters of other communions by virtue of their status as 'Recognised and Regarded' or 'Authorised Ministers'; lay people by being authorised by the Conference. Though the Cornwall Memorial is not entirely clear, the use of the word 'commended' suggests that the Memorial envisages that authorisation would still be by the Conference. The significant difference, however, is that the Conference would be expected automatically to grant an authorisation if a Circuit judged it appropriate and the role of the Lay Authorisations Committee would be simply to present names, rather than to evaluate every application.

38. It is true that, unless they themselves request otherwise, probationer ministers are virtually automatically given authorisations and it could be argued that the Cornwall Memorial simply seeks to extend a practice which already exists. But there is an essential difference. Unlike Lay Workers, Probationers have been accepted as suitable candidates for presbyteral ministry, have received initial training, and are preparing themselves to exercise such ministry.
39. Third, however, there has been some concern about instances of people who have offered for presbyteral ministry, whose offers have not been accepted, who have subsequently been appointed as Lay Workers and who have been granted authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper. Thus there are individuals who are exercising in practice a ministry of the Word and Sacraments without being ordained to that ministry (which is true of all lay people authorised under Standing Order 011) but also having been judged unsuitable for it. This state of affairs is unsatisfactory but rare. The adoption of Memorial M52 would allow it to happen more frequently.
40. Fourth, the Memorial makes no reference to 'deprivation', which has been the ground upon which, hitherto, applications have been granted. Adoption of the Memorial would make it possible for circuits to 'commend' Lay Workers for authorisations where no deprivation existed and would thus be a radical departure from our usage. It may be that ongoing discussion will reach the conclusion that grounds other than deprivation should be allowed – or it may not. There is no case for changing Standing Orders in the way required by the Memorial unless and until that conclusion is reached and even if that were to happen, the other points made above would still count against the Memorial.
41. For all these reasons, the Conference is advised not to alter its procedures in the manner suggested by the Cornwall District's Memorial.

Conclusion

42. No change to Standing Orders is proposed at the present time, but resolutions related to the recommendations within this report are appended below.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts this report and commends it to Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches for discussion.

The Conference adopts this report as its reply to Suggestion 52(S)(1992) and to Memorial M52 (1993).

The Conference re-affirms the principle of 'Extended Communion' and encourages Circuits to consider how 'Extended Communion' may enhance eucharistic ministry within Local Churches and in homes and hospitals.

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare suitable liturgical material for 'Extended Communion' and to report to the Conference of 1995.

The Conference invites Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches to send their comments on the issues raised in this report to the Secretary of the Faith and

Order Committee not later than 31 December 1995 and directs the Faith and Order Committee to present a further report, in the light of the comments received, to the Conference of 1996.

APPENDIX A

Criteria adopted by the committee on Lay Authorisations in Calculating Deprivation

In attempting to interpret the definition of basic deprivation contained in the Faith and Order report, the Committee on Lay Authorisation has the difficult task of taking into account many factors. Some can be quantified, others cannot. The extent of the influence of the latter has to rest on the experience and judgement of the members of the Committee, whose recommendation is, of course, subject to the judgement of Conference.

The following 'guidelines' help the Committee in reaching a judgement on basic deprivation as defined in section 1 of the Faith and Order report.

1. The number of churches is calculated on the assumption that a church has two services. If a considerable number of churches in a circuit have only one service per week the number of churches is reduced for the purposes of any calculation. No mathematical formula can be offered, times of services and the number of one service churches have to be borne in mind in arriving at an agreed number of churches figure.
2. The number of ministers is calculated by adding to the number of ministers stationed other ministerial help available. The Committee takes into account evidence of assistance being offered by supernumerary ministers, ministers in other appointments and ministers without pastoral charge. For example, an active supernumerary, with transport, who conducts 13 services a quarter, might be counted as half a minister for the purpose of this calculation.
3. The number of churches is divided by the number of ministers and if the result is five or more a situation of deprivation is deemed to exist.
4. If the result of the calculation is less than five but close to it the Committee takes into consideration the following factors which cannot easily be quantified.
 - (a) A circuit which is widespread and where there is evidence of travel problems.
 - (b) The personal circumstances of individual ministers (e.g. transport available and health).
 - (c) The relative sizes of churches, bearing in mind that a minister is likely to want to conduct more services in a large church than in a lot of smaller churches.
 - (d) Other relevant evidence offered in the submission by the Synod.

5. Similar criteria to the above are used when an application is received in an emergency under S.O. 011 (7).
6. When application for a renewal is received under S.O. 011(5), evidence is sought of the frequency with which a person, who has received an authorisation previously, has conducted the Lord's Supper.

APPENDIX B

The Report of the Faith and Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 recommended the following criteria to be applied in relation to "missionary situations".

1. The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and District support for such a mission, and signs of growth.
2. The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.
3. The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the 'isolated area', living within it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.
4. It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement.

(Agenda 1994, pp.636-645)

AUTHORISATIONS TO PRESIDE AT THE LORD'S SUPPER (1996)

Introduction

- 1 The Conference of 1994 received a report, Lay Authorisations, prepared by the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee and commended it to Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches for discussion. The report had been written in response to Suggestion 52(S) (1992) and to Memorial M52 (1993):

The Southampton Synod (R) (Present 232. Vote: 185 for, 47 against) suggests that the first paragraph of SO 011 be amended to read: "A Circuit which considers that (*any of its churches*) SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF A CHURCH'S MEMBERSHIP OR OF CHRISTIANS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY are deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (*through lack of ordained ministers*) may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent." [Suggestion 52(S)]

The Cornwall Synod (R) (Present 180. Vote 114 for, 58 against, 8 neutral) sends the following Memorial to Conference: "All Lay Workers appointed under SO 581(1) to pastoral and/or evangelistic work, and who are Fully Accredited Local Preachers, may have a dispensation to administer the sacraments whilst so appointed, if so commended by their Circuit Meeting." [Memorial M52]

- 2 The 1994 report indicated the way in which the Methodist Church had dealt with the question of lay authorisations since 1932, set out a variety of views about the question which exist among Methodists, and made a number of recommendations:

that the Conference should re-affirm the principle of 'Extended Communion' and encourage Circuits to consider how 'Extended Communion' may enhance eucharistic ministry within Local Churches and in homes and hospitals. (A resolution to this effect was adopted by the Conference.)

that the Conference should direct the Faith and Order Committee to prepare suitable liturgical material for 'Extended Communion' and to report to the Conference of 1995. (A resolution to this effect was adopted by the Conference and a form of service for 'Extended Communion' was authorised by the 1995 Conference.)

that the Conference should invite Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches to send their comments on the issues raised in the report to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee not later than 31 December 1995 and that the Faith and Order Committee should present a further report, in the light

of the comments received, to the Conference of 1996. (A resolution to this effect was adopted by the Conference.)

- 3 The report indicated some of the questions which the General Purposes and Faith and Order Committees hoped would be addressed by correspondents.

Among the questions which need to be considered are the following.

Are our existing procedures adequate to meet the eucharistic needs of a Church in which the Lord's Supper is increasingly valued and in which patterns of lay and ordained ministry are continuing to change and develop?

Is the way in which S.O. 011 is applied in practice satisfactory?

S.O. 011 regards 'deprivation' as the only acceptable ground for application for lay authorisation, and for this reason that Standing Order has a rather negative tone. ***Is it possible or desirable to frame a Standing Order in more positive terms? Are there positive rather than negative reasons for the granting of lay authorisations?***

Comments from Districts, Circuits, Local Churches and Individuals

- 4 The Faith and Order Committee is grateful to those who responded to the Conference's invitation to send comments on the issues raised by the report. 58 letters were received:

- 1 summarising a District Synod discussion;
- 1 on behalf of a District Ministries Committee;
- 3 on behalf of Circuit Meetings;
- 1 on behalf of a Circuit Staff;
- 1 from a Circuit Meeting Secretary on behalf of several local churches;
- 1 on behalf of a Circuit Ministries Committee;
- 1 on behalf of a Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting;
- 1 on behalf of a Church Council;
- 1 on behalf of a General Church Meeting;
- 47 from individuals.

- 5 Of the 47 individual letters,

- 31 were from lay people, of whom 12 identified themselves as Local Preachers and 7 indicated that they were or had been Lay Workers;
- 15 were from Ministers; and
- 1 was from a Deaconess.

- 6 12 correspondents made explicit reference to the 1994 report. 35 letters indicated that they had been written in response to a short article, 'Presiding at Communion', published in "Connect" and written by the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee to make the invitation to comment more widely known. 4 letters addressed only the issue of 'Extended Communion' and said nothing about authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper.

- 7 9 writers were firmly against any extension of authorisations for persons other than ministers to preside (2 of whom were opposed to any such authorisations in any circumstances).

- 8 17 correspondents cited the doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers' in support of lay authorisations.
- 9 Most of the letters advocate change, but, not surprisingly, there is no unanimity about the nature of that change. Most of the suggestions can be loosely grouped together in three categories. (Where more than one correspondent made the same suggestion, this is indicated by a number in brackets.)
- 10a) Those arguing that the current system (authorisation by the Conference in accordance with SO 011) should be retained but modified:

Deprivation should be defined less rigidly (2);

To talk of deprivation is too negative; it would be better to speak positively of opportunity (2);

A better mathematical formula for calculating deprivation should be found;

Though the Conference should continue to grant authorisations, the Lay Authorisations Committee should give more weight to the recommendations of the Districts (4);

Though the Conference should continue to grant authorisations, District Synods or Policy Committees should be able to deal with their renewal;

The Lay Authorisations Committee should give more weight to the pastoral relationship that exists between a local church or churches and the person for whom authorisation is sought; if a Lay Worker exercises pastoral care and leads worship regularly in a local church, this should be regarded as a compelling argument for an authorisation to be granted (3);

Authorisations should not be restricted to particular groups of people, for example Local Preachers;

Conversely, everyone to whom an authorisation is granted should be a Local Preacher (2);

All Probationers, Deaconesses, Deacons, and Probationer Deaconesses and Deacons should have the automatic right to preside;

Conversely, Deacons and Deaconesses should not be granted authorisations, because this blurs the distinction between presbyteral and diaconal ministry;

No-one whose offer for presbyteral ministry has not been accepted should be granted an authorisation.

- 11b) Those arguing that authorisations should be granted other than by the Conference:

District Committees should be appointed to consider and, where appropriate, grant authorisations;

Districts or Circuits should have the right to grant authorisations;

Where a Church Council and the Superintendent agree that there is need, the Superintendent should be able to grant an authorisation for one occasion only (2);

Circuit Meetings should have the power to grant authorisations, subject to the District Chairman's approval;

Circuit Meetings should have the power to grant authorisations, just as they approve the accreditation of Local Preachers;

Superintendents should be able to authorise suitable people to preside on occasions like Christmas Midnight and Easter Day when it would not otherwise be possible to meet the eucharistic needs of every local church (2);

Church Councils should have the right to appoint people to preside at the Lord's Supper for midweek celebrations in housegroups, nursing homes, etc.

12c) Those arguing that the notion of limited authorisation should be abandoned:

There should be no authorisations to preside; it should be agreed that any Christian has a right to do so. Authorisations should be for local churches to opt out of lay presidency, for example in a Local Ecumenical Partnership;

Every Local Preacher who wishes to do so should have the same authority to preside as to preach, as appointed by the Superintendent (4);

Lay Workers who are Local Preachers and have pastoral charge should have an automatic right to preside;

Local Preachers should be allowed to preside after five years' service.

13 Certain other suggestions, which do not fit into the three categories, were made:

An optional training course should be produced in a "Faith & Worship" style for Local Preachers and others (3); such a course should be mandatory for those authorised to preside;

Proper attention should be given to the fact that some people testify to a sense of call to exercise a sacramental ministry but not to a sense of call to other aspects of presbyteral ministry (2).

14 Four correspondents suggested that Ministers regarded their virtually exclusive right to preside at the Lord's Supper as a mark of status and that discussion of lay authorisation made them defensive. Several suggested that ecumenical considerations were not all on one side of the argument and that the Methodist Church should do what it believed to be right, regardless of such considerations.

15 The correspondence does not reveal a groundswell of opinion in favour of any single change, except, perhaps, a change towards greater flexibility, however understood. The letters do, however, raise the following issues, which this report will seek to address:

- a) The relevance of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to this discussion;
 - b) Presbyteral ministry and the Lord's Supper;
 - c) The relationship between pastoral charge and presidency at the Lord's Supper;
 - d) Ecumenical considerations;
 - e) The future of SO 011.
- 16 Another issue which arises from the correspondence is that of discipline and authority. Almost a tenth of the letters refer to breaches of the spirit, and sometimes the letter, of our usage. Four lay people, not authorised to preside at the Lord's Supper, mentioned that they had done so during visits to the sick or on other occasions. One mentioned that a person with an authorisation to preside had in fact done so at a circuit united service, at which Ministers were present. From all this, it could be argued that our discipline is being eroded because it does not make sense to people and that it should therefore be revised. Two correspondents argued that case. An alternative view, argued by another correspondent, is that there is a need to recognise that discipline is a vital part of discipleship and that the Church should not amend it in response to particular cases in which it has been ignored.

Two Further Memorials

- 17 The 1995 Conference received two further Memorials on the subject of lay presidency:
- M17:** The Dorking and Horsham (3/20) Circuit Meeting (Present 41. Vote: 36 for, 5 ag) have noted the report adopted by the 1994 Conference on Lay Authorisations, but believing the practice of Extended Communion not to be applicable in all cases, such as times when the local church has not celebrated Holy Communion in the previous week, requests Conference to ask the Faith and Order Committee, in preparing its report for the 1996 Conference, carefully to consider whether there might be situations in which it could be appropriate to grant a Lay Authorisation specifically to permit lay presidency in the cases of Holy Communion in homes and other residential accommodation, without such an Authorisation including Sunday Church Worship.
- M18:** The Ashbourne (22/11) Circuit Meeting (Present 17. Vote: Unan.) request Conference to ask the Faith and Order Committee to re-examine the theological justification for restricting authority to preside at the Lord's Supper to ordained ministers and those lay people granted a dispensation by the Conference, and to consider whether discretion should be granted to Superintendent Ministers to appoint any fully accredited local preacher to preside, in view of: 1. the need to witness to the priesthood of all believers; 2. the increasing demand for the celebration of the sacrament; 3. the close link between the ministry of the word and sacrament; 4. the problems caused during the illness of ministers and other authorised persons; the difficulty of singling out a local preacher from his/her peers to be nominated for a dispensation.

- 18 The Conference referred both these Memorials to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration and report in the context of the present report.

The Priesthood of All Believers

- 19 The reference to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in Clause 4 of the Deed of Union was cited by several correspondents (several more referring to the doctrine without reference to the Deed). The relevant words are:

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of persons but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised.

All Methodist preachers are examined tested and approved before they are authorised to minister in holy things. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.

- 20 The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was discussed in the Faith and Order Committee's report on diaconal ministry which was adopted by the Conference of 1995. It receives further discussion in another Faith and Order report, section E of this *Agenda*, which will be before the present Conference. It is an important doctrine, drawn from the New Testament, emphasised during the Protestant Reformation, and cited in the Deed of Union. But what is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers?
- 21 One correspondent wrote: "The Methodist Church believes in the priesthood of all believers, so anyone should be able to do it (i.e. preside at the Lord's Table)". The Faith and Order Committee would be failing in its duty if it did not emphasise in this report that no such conclusion can properly be drawn from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, as it appears in the New Testament and as it is expounded by the Reformers.
- 22 In the New Testament, the priesthood of the body of believers is stressed. I Peter 2:9 does not address the question of individual priesthood but rather the priesthood of the whole Christian community, derived from that community's sharing in the high priesthood of Christ himself. Elsewhere, and particularly in the Pauline letters, individuals are seen to have individual gifts from the Spirit and each has his or her own task to fulfil.
- 23 The 16th century reformers say less about the priesthood of all believers than is commonly supposed. Though they rejected the notion that a priestly intermediary was necessary in order that a believer might have access to God, they did not deny the distinctiveness of the ordained ministry. Luther argued that the latter was of dominical appointment and of the *esse* of the Church. Similarly, Calvin, while affirming the priesthood of all believers, insisted that the ordained presbyteral ministry was essential to the Church:

Neither are the light and heat of the sun, nor meat and drink, so necessary to sustain and cherish the present life, as is the apostolic and pastoral office to preserve a Church in the earth. (*Institutes*, 4.3.2.)

- 24 An appendix on 'The Priesthood of All Believers' accompanies a recent United Reformed Church report, *Patterns of Ministry*. After setting out the New Testament and Reformation contributions to the doctrine, the appendix continues:

It should now be abundantly clear (in Gordon Rupp's words) that the priesthood of all believers did not mean for the reformers what it tends to mean for us, "an otiose ministry and an omnicompetent laity". The reformers did not think that anyone could do anything in church, far from it.

- 25 The Conference of 1960 adopted a statement, *Ordination in the Methodist Church*, which is quoted elsewhere in this *Agenda*. It states clearly that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers 'does not mean that every Christian has the right to exercise every function and administer both sacraments'. To say that every believer is a priest because he or she belongs to the priestly body is to state that each shares in the priesthood of Christ. We offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. The doctrine 'is not an assertion of claims, but a declaration of our total obedience'.

- 26 The 1960 statement goes on to affirm that Ministers are priests in the same way that all God's people are priests, but that this does not mean that every believer, every priest, is a Minister. This is an important point to make in connection with the matter under review. It is not as priests that Ministers normally preside at the Lord's Supper, but as Ministers, as representative persons, "set apart by ordination to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments" (*Deed of Union*).

- 27 Our doctrinal standards undoubtedly allow for a distinctive ordained presbyteral ministry, though equally clearly they reject the notion that any exclusive priesthood is inherent in it. Some are set apart by ordination "for the sake of church order". A number of correspondents have suggested that this phrase means nothing more than "so that things might be done decently". They allege that, while this may have been necessary in 1932, it is not necessary now. Local preachers, they write, nowadays could be trusted to preside properly at the Lord's Table. But this is to misunderstand the phrase, "for the sake of church order". In the first place, if it had meant what these correspondents understand it to mean, it would surely have been grossly insulting to those pre-union churches where lay presidency was practised and would not have been acceptable to them. In the second place, "church order" is about much more than "doing things decently". It is about how the Church is structured, what is proper to its life, how things should be. On this understanding, some are set apart by ordination to a sacramental ministry because the order of the Church requires that they should be. "In the exercise of its (the Church's) corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised". Ministers share the priesthood of all God's people, but, in addition, they are set apart for a particular ministry. The point about

“order” in this connection is that ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments is a matter of church order, though such ordination must not be interpreted as conveying any exclusive priestly virtue.

- 28 The argument that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers requires that Methodism should abandon its usage that presidency at the Lord’s Supper should normally be by an ordained presbyter cannot be sustained. Neither the New Testament, nor the Reformers, nor the Deed of Union supports it.

Presbyteral Ministry and the Lord’s Supper

- 29 It was mentioned in 14 above that some correspondents had suggested that Ministers regarded their virtually exclusive right to preside at the Lord’s Supper as a mark of status and that discussion of lay authorisation made them defensive. That may well be the case. It would not be surprising if some Ministers felt it wrong that a central part of the ministry which they had been called, trained and ordained to fulfil could, as a matter of course rather than in exceptional circumstances, be fulfilled by others. But ministerial feelings are unreliable guides to church order. Status is an ambiguous concept. If some ministers believe that their ordination gives them a special importance and makes them superior persons, then such a belief is deplorable. But if the reference to status is actually an acknowledgment that to preside at the Lord’s table is an activity which a Minister has been authorised and charged at ordination to fulfil, then the discussion is quite properly back in the context of church order.

- 30 The God whom we worship and serve is revealed in Jesus Christ, in whose ministry ‘status’ is not denied but redefined. Jesus is revealed as God’s Son at the moment when he identifies himself with sinful humanity by submitting to baptism. Jesus says, “You call me Master and Lord, and rightly, for so I am”. Yet this Master and Lord washes the feet of the disciples as an example of the way in which they are to serve one another. It is in this context that all ministry, lay, presbyteral or diaconal, is to be understood and exercised. Surely no Local Preacher would ever think, “What an important person I am” as he or she stands in the pulpit, but rather “I am here, by God’s grace, to serve him and his people as I lead worship”. Leadership and service go together. Similarly, a Minister, standing at the Lord’s table, will be humbled by the thought that he or she has been called and ordained to exercise a ministry of which such presidency forms a part. It should not be a matter of personal pride, still less an assertion of personal status, but rather one way of fulfilling that vocation of service to Christ and his Church which the Minister has been made a Minister to fulfil. Just as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers ‘is not an assertion of claims, but a declaration of our total obedience’, so presidency at the Lord’s Supper is not a declaration of personal status but an act of obedient service.

- 31 It follows that it is not appropriate to talk about the ‘right’ to preside. No-one has such a right. Those who preside are authorised by the Church to do that which, in themselves, they have no right to do. Ministers are so authorised by their ordination; others may be authorised by the act of the Conference.

Pastoral charge and presidency at the Lord's Supper

- 32 There is a widespread assumption among Methodists that there is a close connection between pastoral charge and presidency at the Lord's Supper. This is to be expected, because in most Methodist churches the person who normally presides is the Minister in pastoral charge. It is the pattern to which most Methodists are accustomed. This normal arrangement, however, cannot operate when most if not all of the pastoral oversight of a local church is entrusted to someone who is not a Minister or Probationer. Unless that person has an authorisation to preside, a Minister from another section of the circuit must be appointed to preside at celebrations of the Lord's Supper. For many years, there have been those who have claimed that to bring in a Minister from elsewhere is inappropriate; the Lay Worker, Deacon or Deaconess with pastoral responsibility should be authorised to preside, on the grounds that a pastoral relationship exists in a way that it does not with a Minister from another part of the Circuit. A number of correspondents have made this point.
- 33 The Conference's response has been to point out that local churches belong to Circuits, that Ministers are appointed to Circuits, and that only deprivation of the Lord's Supper and missionary opportunity, rather than the desire to have one's 'own' pastor presiding, are reasonable grounds for the granting of authorisations. To put too much emphasis upon local pastoral charge, whether by a Minister or by someone else, may indicate a weakening of the sense of the importance of the Circuit and the way in which resources of all kinds are shared within it. A couple of correspondents referred to Ministers from other parts of their Circuits as 'strangers'. In earlier times, such a notion would have been inconceivable. It is true that the long process of more and more 'sectionalization' of Circuits has brought many advantages, including the possibility of more continuity in preaching. But it is regrettable when a Minister from the same Circuit can be regarded as a stranger, rather than as part of a Circuit staff team.
- 34 There is, however, a case to be made for the view that a qualified stranger is to be preferred to an unqualified friend. (This assumes, as suggested earlier, that to be 'qualified' normally means to be ordained. It is not to suggest that others cannot, and do not, preside competently when authorised to do so, but rather that they are not 'qualified' in the normal way.) In many branches of the Church, where lay authorisation is not allowed in any circumstances, worshippers are grateful for the eucharistic ministry of visiting clergy, whom they may never previously have met, when there is a vacancy or other absence. What matters is that there is someone to preside, not whether he or she has a pastoral relationship with them. What constitutes appropriate presidency is seen as a matter of order, rather than of relationship.
- 35 This way of thinking does not appear to be very widely shared by Methodists. But it seems likely that a considerable increase in the number of lay authorisations would result if pastoral relationship, regardless of deprivation, were regarded as a telling argument for authorisation. This would tend to blur the distinction between particular callings and ministries. Within the ministry of all God's people, as we have seen, the New Testament speaks of particular gifts and tasks. The Methodist Church can rejoice in all manner of lay ministries, in diaconal ministry and in presbyteral ministry, without imagining

that all are the same. The Methodist Diaconal Order is not enthusiastic about deacons and deaconesses being authorised to preside, though it is recognised that this is sometimes necessary when local churches might otherwise suffer eucharistic deprivation, fearing that such authorisations might lead to confusion between the two types of ordained ministry. If it is agreed that it belongs to the office and work of a presbyter, rather than to any believer, to preside at the Lord's Supper, then it will be only in exceptional circumstances, and in cases of pressing need, that others will be authorised to preside. A desire that the eucharistic president should be the person in pastoral charge cannot be regarded as an indication of need or potential deprivation.

- 36 The 1994 report offered a number of reasons why Memorial M52 (1993) should not be adopted. The Faith and Order Committee concurs with that judgement, not least in view of what has been written above about the relationship between presiding at the Lord's Supper and pastoral care.

Ecumenical considerations

- 37 As the 1994 report pointed out and some correspondents have mentioned, ecumenical considerations are relevant to this discussion, though they cannot be conclusive. For instance, some of our partner churches do not themselves in any circumstances authorise people other than presbyters to preside at the Lord's Supper. In some Local Ecumenical Partnerships, members of churches which adopt this policy are unable in conscience to accept the sacramental ministry of a person authorised by the Conference to preside. In others, such members are prepared to accept the sacramental ministry of a person duly authorised according to the discipline of a partner church. Other churches are prepared to grant lay authorisation more readily than the Methodist Church and may regard our procedures as cumbersome or negative.
- 38 It is obvious that ecumenical considerations are not in themselves giving the Methodist Church a strong indication that it should reconsider its policy on this matter or move in any particular direction.

The future of S.O. 011

- 39 One of the questions posed by the 1994 report was "Is the way in which S.O. 011 is applied in practice satisfactory?" Few correspondents offered direct answers to this question, and of those who did, most described their dissatisfaction with the recommendations of the Lay Authorisations Committee in particular cases.
- 40 Taking up the first question posed in 1994 (see 3 above) some correspondents suggested that the weakness of the Standing Order is its negativity. To talk of deprivation is too negative; it would be better to speak positively of opportunity – for more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper in church and in homes and hospitals. Some added that deprivation should be defined less rigidly, allowing for the fact that housebound people may be deprived of the Lord's Supper even if the active members of their local churches were not so deprived.
- 41 Though reference to deprivation may seem to be a negative approach to the subject, the thinking behind it is positive: every Methodist should have the

opportunity to share regularly in this sacrament. It is assumed that this will normally be possible because there will be sufficient Ministers to preside at celebrations. If there are not, a state of deprivation exists and the Conference authorises others to preside.

- 42 Suggestion 52(S) (1992) sought to extend the purposes for which authorisations might be granted – to meet the eucharistic needs of sick and housebound people in their own homes, in nursing homes, or in hospital. The 1994 report suggested that Extended Communion may well be the answer to these needs in many cases. A service for Extended Communion was adopted by the Conference of 1995.
- 43 Correspondents who commented on this suggestion in the report were divided in their reactions. Some regarded Extended Communion as an exciting possibility which they had not previously considered but which could well solve many problems. Others regarded it as theologically suspect or unhelpful in practice: visits to those who would wish to receive bread and wine could not always be timed to follow celebrations in church.
- 44 A theological defence of Extended Communion appears in the 1994 report and the Faith and Order Committee continues to believe that this practice is not only compatible with our doctrines but also a means of providing eucharistic ministry in many of the cases of deprivation outlined in 42 above. Nevertheless, there are exceptions, and the Committee is persuaded that an amended form of Suggestion 52(S) (1992) may help to meet needs where Extended Communion is not regarded as suitable or possible.
- 45 It is proposed, therefore, that deprivation should continue to be the principal ground for authorisation, but that the understanding of deprivation should be widened, as in the Southampton District's Suggestion. The connexional Committee responsible for recommending authorisations to the Conference would need to scrutinise applications, as it does at present, but would in addition have to take into account the needs and opportunities for home and hospital communion. Only when it was clear that such needs and opportunities could not be met by ordained or probationer Ministers, or by the practice of Extended Communion, would the Committee recommend the granting of an authorisation. Resolution 2 seeks to extend the circumstances which may be regarded as deprivation.
- 46 Some correspondents expressed the opinion that the body entitled to grant authorisations should be the District Synod, the Circuit Meeting, or even the Church Council. The Faith and Order Committee, however, believes that the present arrangement should continue. Everyone authorised to preside at the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church is directly or indirectly authorised to do so by the Conference – indirectly in the case of Ministers, whose authorisation stems from their reception into full connexion and ordination; directly in the case of others. It seems right to the Faith and Order Committee that this should continue to be the case.

Other Matters

- 47 The Committee responsible for advising the Conference on authorisations is known as the 'Lay Authorisations Committee'. In view of the affirmation of the 1993 and 1995 Conferences that the Methodist Church has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal, it is not appropriate for deaconesses and deacons to be described as 'lay', though it is desirable that applications for authorisations for members of the diaconate to preside should be considered by the same committee that considers other applications. For this reason, the Faith and Order Committee recommends that in future the Committee should be known simply as the 'Authorisations Committee'. Resolution 3 seeks to amend S.O. 011(3) to this effect.
- 48 As to the questions posed in 3 above, this report has already addressed the third, arguing that taking steps to compensate for deprivation is in fact positive. Little evidence has been offered to suggest that the way in which S.O. 011 is applied in practice is unsatisfactory, which answers the second question. The first question was, 'Are our existing procedures adequate to meet the eucharistic needs of a Church in which the Lord's Supper is increasingly valued and in which patterns of lay and ordained ministry are continuing to change and develop?' The consultation exercise cannot be said to have revealed a need for major change, though it has been suggested in 45 above that the criteria for authorisation need to be broadened.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the report and resolves that it shall be the Conference's reply to Memorials M17 and M18 (1995) and its further reply to Suggestion 52(S) (1992) and to Memorial M52 (1993).

The Conference amends S.O. 011(1) to read:

"A Circuit which considers that 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 through lack of ordained ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent."

The Conference amends S.O. 011(3) by deleting "Lay" (three times) and by substituting 'an' for 'a' after 'convener of' in line 3.

(Agenda 1996, pp.192-204)

ii) Children at Holy Communion

CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION (1987)

The Conference of 1984 directed the Division of Education and Youth, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring proposals to encourage the fuller participation of children in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Division set up a working party which included the convenor of the Faith and Order Committee and the convenor-elect of that Committee; the draft report of the working party was submitted to the Faith and Order Committee in January 1986, prior to its consideration by the Executive and the Board of the Division.

The Conference of 1986 received the report and directed 'the Division of Education and Youth to bring it for decision to Conference 1987, with the comments and recommendations of the Faith and Order Committee, and its response to those comments and recommendations'.

The Convenor of the Faith and Order Committee sent to the Division copies of the written comments of individual members of that Committee, prior to its meeting. We are grateful that two representatives of this Division were invited to attend the Faith and Order Committee, for this business. After the meeting the Committee recorded the following minute, which was sent to the Division as its 'comments and recommendations'.

'The Faith and Order Committee resolved: that the DEY be asked

- (1) to maintain with the Faith and Order Committee the theological principle that baptism is a precondition for communicating participation in Holy Communion;
- (2) to recognise, as does the Faith and Order Committee, that in the pastoral application of this principle, for both children and adults, there is need from time to time for flexibility, in order that in the end the principle may be maintained;
- (3) since neither age nor mental capacity are themselves adequate criteria for determining who may receive the bread and wine in Holy Communion, to ensure that the report states clearly what measure of faith and understanding is required from any person before communicating participation;
- (4) to describe a practical illustration of ways of approaching the pastoral practice where a person desiring to communicate is not baptised;
- (5) to redraft section VII, to make clear which parts are descriptive and which are specific guidelines;
- (6) to strengthen the idea, already expressed in paras. 32 & 39, that the responsibility in this area of the church's life, for decisions taken in the light of the guidelines contained within the report, lies with the Church Council.'

The Division's 'response to those comments and recommendations' is offered in the form of an amended version of the Report that was presented last year, out of a conviction that this will enable the Conference to form its judgement better than by following the strict terms of the direction. A draft of the amended version was seen by the Executive of the Faith and Order Committee which approved it with certain minor emendations which have been incorporated.

Clauses 1 and 2 of the Faith and Order resolution are met by Guidelines A and B; clause 3 by Guideline C; clause 5 by taking guidelines out of section VII (The Way Ahead) as a new section VIII and within that section separating off the Guidelines, underlined, from a paragraph of further comment and clarification; clause 6 by re-writing paragraph 32 and guidelines E and D.

With regard to clause 4 of the resolution, the Guidelines set out how to deal with a child and meet the spirit of this clause. A practical illustration that would be possible within the compass of this Report could not adequately indicate the variety of ways of approaching the pastoral practice, which must be in the hands of the Church Council in the light of local and personal circumstances. More detailed and practical help will be offered by the Division if the Report is accepted – see resolution 1(c) below.

REPORT: CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION

By way of Definition

We have used '*children*' to cover the whole age range of the Division of Education and Youth's Children's Work Section, ie, under 13's. This does not preclude older young people from our proposals.

We have used '*workers with children*' to cover the many different terms used throughout the Connexion, ie, Junior Church Leaders; Sunday School teachers; Shell Group Leaders; Junior Youth Club Leaders, etc.

We have used '*The Lord's Supper*' as a designation for the service itself as this is a widely used term and was the name preferred by Wesley.

I Preamble

1. The 1984 Methodist Conference directed the Division of Education and Youth, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring proposals to encourage the fuller participation of children in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

2. Previous reports on this subject were presented to Conference by the Faith and Order Committee in 1973 and 1975. A period of flexibility and experiment was proposed, but without any constitutional action which might impose excessive rigidity in these matters.

In the past decade many churches have seen an increased participation in morning worship by children, and this has led to a reconsideration of their place in the church. Alongside this there is a growing tendency for children to be present in church at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In some of the churches the children receive the bread and wine as full worshipping members of the community. In other situations children share in the Lord's Supper simply by being present. Other

churches invite the children forward at an appropriate point to receive a blessing. There remain some churches where there is no involvement of children in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

3. Surveys and enquiries in a number of Districts have revealed the diversity of practice reflected in the above remarks. Those who involve children fully in the Lord's Supper are working in many different situations; some are actively engaged in all-age worship as a regular feature of their worshipping life; some are working in ecumenical situations; some are forging closer links between the 'Sunday School' and the church; some are working in new towns or on council housing estates; some are in large suburban churches, others in rural or small-church situations; others are involved in projects of mission which have resulted in whole families coming to join in worship.

4. We acknowledge the work done by the Faith and Order Committee in its previous reports and we endorse their judgement:

'Holy Communion has been experienced as a means of grace in a wide range of human situations. Similarly many responses to it have been possible, touching at different times and different levels the intellectual and emotional elements in the person who receives it. A young child, or even an adult, may not bring to it a great deal of the intellectual understanding that may be possible at a further stage in his development, yet he can make an appropriate response according to his capacity at that particular point in his development. The child may thus be admitted to communicant membership on the basis of his Baptism plus the faith of which he is capable. John Wesley himself went further than this in seeing Baptism giving 'union with the Church, a share in all its privileges' (Works X 191) and consistently ignored confirmation. A child thus introduced into the sacramental life of the Church can grow through it to that form of commitment we associate with 'conversion' and take on the responsibilities of membership of Society.'¹

In framing our proposals we have been mindful of the discussion document by the Division of Ministries, 'Church Membership and Christian Nurture' and the Faith and Order Committee's document 'Christian Initiation'. We believe that our proposals are in harmony with the principles underlying these reports.

5. Our proposals develop the findings of the Conference report on Initiation in 1985: 'Baptism is the one essential rite for entry into the Church and those who have received it are entitled to their place at the Lord's Table, though it may be expedient for this to be delayed.' - Section C4(iii), 1985 Agenda, p624.

II Our Understanding of the Place of the Child in the Church

6. Within the New Testament distinctions are made between father and children (Ephesians 6:4); older and younger (1 Timothy 5:1f); mature and immature (1 Corinthians 13:11, 14:20); fathers and young men (1 John 2:12f). There are specific references to infancy and babyhood (eg. Matthew 21:16).

¹ Methodist Church - Faith and Order Committee, Minutes of Conference 1975 p51

Against the background of the position of the child in the first century, we must also take note of Jesus' dealings with children as they are recorded in the gospels. The most significant reference comes from Mark 10:15 (=Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:17; John 3:3-8). These passages are telling us more about the nature of God than the nature of children. He is a God who graciously gives his Kingdom to children.

Hans-Ruedi Weber in 'Jesus and the Children' suggests that Jesus' attitude to children as recorded in the gospels was both 'deeply Jewish' and 'radically new'. Thus Jesus' actions of receiving children reflect the custom of children asking for the blessing of a famous rabbi. In Jewish culture, however, the child was the learner who 'had to be formed into a fully human being'. So when the disciples posed their question about greatness and Jesus replied by setting a child in their midst, the teaching/learning situation had been reversed. This was new, as was a rabbi identifying himself with children: 'this identification of Jesus with children again confirms the special kind of love which is at the heart of the biblical God.'²

Jesus' readiness to welcome children has been taken by the Church through the ages as providing support for the practice of Infant Baptism and for the care and nurture of children and the young.

7. The Christians of the New Testament period were aware not only of the words and actions of Jesus but were also familiar with Jewish rites of initiation into the fellowship of Israel. Circumcision held an important role in Jewish initiation ceremonies and was traced back to the covenant with Abraham. It was practised for both Jews and Gentiles and for both it marked entry into the Covenant people and was unrepeatable.

The contemporary Jewish background also included the baptism of proselytes and their families which again was a once and for all event.

There is evidence that the early Christians did see their whole family as being 'converted' at the same time as the father. Examples are given of Bishop Polycarp (160 AD) who 'served the Lord for eighty six years'³ and Justin Martyr who talks of men and women who were 'disciples of Christ from childhood'⁴.

8. Rev David Holeton, in a chapter entitled 'The Communion of Infants and Young Children'⁵ suggests that infant communion was the norm in the Christian West until around the thirteenth century. The current 'tradition' of receiving first communion following Confirmation in early adolescence is of a much later origin, indeed Confirmation was unknown in some countries before the nineteenth century. The traditional sequence of Baptism for babies, Sunday School for children. Confirmation and first Communion for adolescents and the full diet of worship for adults is still the understanding of many. However, the position of the child in the community of the faithful is now attracting renewed interest. This has led to attempts to restate the place of the child in the Church and has led some churches to conclude that there ought to be universal participation by all the baptised in the Lords' Supper itself, without distinction of age, intellect or social status. The

² Hans-Ruedi Weber: *Jesus and the Children* p51

³ Quoted by Neil Dixon: *Troubled Waters* p31

⁴ Ditto

⁵ In '...and do not hinder them', ed. G Muller-Fahrenholz, WCC 1982 (F & O Paper 109)

alternative position of denying children a place at the Lords' Table would suggest that they are not part of the church, despite their baptism.

9. Society's understanding of children is constantly changing. Thus during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, children were often 'seen and not heard' in society. The phrase is not much heard today. The International Year of the Child (1979) tried to make people more sensitive to both the needs of children and their capacity to contribute to the quality of family and community life. Children today are encouraged to speak and mix with adults and to make their contribution to the community to which they belong.

10. The 1969 Inter-Divisional paper 'The Lord's People on the Lord's Day' reached this conclusion: 'All our thinking about worship on the Lord's Day flows from our basic conviction that the Lord's people belong together on the Lord's Day, their worship is a corporate offering'⁶. This we affirm. In the service of Infant Baptism, we boldly declare that we wish to receive children into our midst. Our concern is to see how children may be encouraged to take a fuller part in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Children are welcomed into the Church for what they have to offer. In such situations children learn by doing. We believe that it is important that children learn of the sacraments 'by doing and belonging' within a caring and loving atmosphere.

III Some Understandings of the Lord's Supper

11. From the birth of the Church to today, Christians have found their faith sharpened and deepened as they have celebrated the Lord's Supper. By the middle of the second century (or earlier) a complete service of word and sacrament had been devised. The structure for this grew more elaborate as the years passed. The work of modern liturgical scholars has enabled the Church to rediscover and express the centrality of the Lord's Supper, so enriching faith both for the individual Christian and the gathered congregation.

12. Apart from a similarity to some Jewish meals the Lord's Supper is exclusively Christian. Within the simple and yet profound action of the breaking and sharing of bread and the pouring and drinking of wine, stand a great foundation of history and tradition leading back to the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. The Lord's Supper is a *memorial* of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Hebrew origins of the word memorial include power and excitement. To remember is so to relive the past that the power and meaning of the event become part of the experience and conviction of the one remembering. When Christians eat and drink 'in remembrance' they share an act which is faith-creating and faith-enriching.

13. The Lord's Supper is also a *communion*. This is demonstrated and symbolised as participants share in one loaf and so witness that they are part of one body.

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ. Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in the one loaf.⁷

⁶ Methodist Church - DEY, DSR, etc. *The Lord's People on the Lord's Day* p4

⁷ Methodist Service Book pB14

As they have communion with the one to whose body they belong, they have communion with one another. To exclude any member is thus to destroy the symbol of the one loaf.

14. The Lord's Supper is a *eucharist*. Christians have fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit they are enabled with all God's people to rejoice in the glory of God's redeeming love for all mankind. This is their vision and at the same time their experience and foretaste of the life of Heaven when Christ's people are finally one in the oneness of God their Father. In this spirit of rejoicing they offer themselves to God's praise and glory.

The Lord's Supper is not only a declaration of God's redeeming love, it is also an affirmation that God's self-giving love is at the heart of creation. Children have an affinity with creation reflected in their capacity to respond in wonder, joy and appreciation. Adults and children sharing bread and wine together can help each other to a richer experience of the fullness of God's love in both creation and redemption.

So Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper and the presence of young and old assists the thanksgiving and rejoicing. The celebration is communicated through words and symbolic actions which combine to reveal the mystery of divine grace. Age is not the dominant factor for grasping this experience. We need all ages together to know the fullest revelation of fellowship, acceptance, joy, forgiveness and love in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

15. As Christians participate in a ceremony which is so rich with meaning there is clearly room for people to respond at many different levels mentally, spiritually and emotionally - however inadequate some of these responses may seem to others. Children or perhaps adults may not bring to the service a great deal of intellectual understanding which may depend on a further stage of their development, but such persons will be making an appropriate response of faith according to their capacity at that particular point.

We now acknowledge that children bring their own experience and understanding to worship. This is not to expect an adult's awareness but an entirely valid experience of the child's personal faith and commitment. To children our actions speak louder than words. Participation in Holy Communion is more than eating and drinking - it is the power of symbol; the significance of drama; the sharing of memory and the passing on of story; it is the offering of all our senses in gratitude to God for the blessings of the Gospel of his love for us revealed in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV Our Traditions

16. There is not a single Methodist tradition with unbroken continuity from Wesley to the present day. From Wesley's own writing and practice different conclusions have been drawn and it is possible on the issue of children and the Lord's Supper to argue opposite points of view from our traditions. Within the history of the Methodist Church there is little by way of historical evidence regarding the practice of children sharing in the Lord's Supper. This should not be taken as indicating a deliberate attempt to bar children, but rather it reflects the place of the child in nineteenth and twentieth century society. As Methodism

developed, children were catered for in separate institutions which in time led to the growth of the Sunday School movement. This represented a radical new approach to children, with the church leading the way for the rest of society in caring for their education and well-being. There are, of course, exceptions to every assumption which is made in a historical study and biographies of some Methodist 'worthies' indicate that they became members of societies at an early age, some soon after birth.

17. There is little reference to the Lord's Supper at all in many of the biographies but this may well be accounted for by the infrequent celebrations (at best quarterly). The Lord's Supper usually followed the preaching service. This rested upon the conviction that the preaching service was the grand gathering whose prime purpose was the conversion of the unconverted. When it was over, the uncommitted withdrew and allowed the committed to proceed with the Lord's Supper. This notion that the Lord's Supper belongs to the inner core would seem to be contrary to the lifelong conviction of Wesley. He held a consistently high estimation of the Lord's Supper as 'the grand channel whereby the grace of His spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God'.⁸ For Wesley the Supper was one of the means whereby the faith that brings salvation is conveyed to those who before it had none. The scope of the Lord's Supper thus became widened for Wesley as a result of his strong evangelical conversion. After his Aldersgate experience the Lord's Supper was not only a 'sanctifying ordinance' for those who had the assurance of salvation but also a means whereby those who were only nominally Christian might be converted. The Lord's Supper became an evangelical instrument, as was preaching. Thus Wesley invited to the table the unconverted along with the converted. His main guidance for admission to the table was evidence of a degree of faith. There can be no doubt that the Lord's Supper played an important part in the Wesley revival.

18. Wesley held a tension between evangelical and catholic standpoints. Subsequently Wesley's understanding of the sacraments has suffered at the hands of those who have exaggerated or minimised the place of the Lord's Supper in his belief and customs. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an extreme 'memorialist' view of the Lord's Supper prevailed with stress on the subjective devotional aspects of the sacrament. The Lord's Supper proclaimed the death of Christ on the Cross and provided the most solemn occasion for the self-examination of those taking part.

But for the Wesleys the Lord's Supper was more than simply a remembering of a past event, it was an anamnesis, a bringing into the present of a moment from the past in a richer connotation:

'By faith we see thy suffering past,
In this mysterious rite brought back'.⁹

There is in John Wesley's thought the idea that the Lord's Supper is the pledge of the glory of heaven, 'a foretaste of the heavenly banquet'¹⁰. Essential to his understanding was the idea that the Lord's Supper could be a converting ordinance and there are many testimonies in biographies to support this view.

⁸ John Wesley *Letters* Vol 2 p315 (London: 1909 Curnock ed.)

⁹ John and Charles Wesley *Eucharistic Hymns* No. 123

¹⁰ Methodist Service Book pB17

19. During most of Wesley's lifetime, involvement in the Lord's Supper (for Methodists) was at the local Parish Church. On special occasions Wesley would hold great celebrations and he recorded the large numbers taking part. Even allowing for enthusiastic counting, they were significant events. Essential to both the 'Preaching Service' and these special services was Wesley's desire to call people to Christian commitment either through the word or the sacrament or both. For Wesley the Lord's Supper was a means of grace to be used at the beginning of the Christian pilgrimage. It becomes most precious to those who are deeply committed Christians. This led to Wesley's strong pleading¹¹ for its use before conversion. This view was based on his understanding of the practice of the early Church and his belief that the Lord's Supper is the sacrament through which one enters into a covenant relationship with God. Wesley never wavered in his understanding that we are admitted to the Church by baptism and are consequently members of the body of Christ.

Whilst Wesley quite clearly believed that the Lord's Supper could be a converting experience, he also expected an increase of faith in seekers after assurance. He presupposed a 'degree of faith' in those who were not yet converted. He sought 'evidence of faith' rather than confirmation as the entry qualifications for any who came to the table.

20. From the earliest days of the Holy Club in Oxford Wesley maintained a passionate interest and concern for the well-being of children and his writings record occasions when he gave Communion to children at his own services. In his early days he regularly communicated children in America, meeting with them in preparation and after a probationary period allowing them to partake of the elements.

In England there are records of children being admitted to Methodist Societies as young as nine and ten, therefore presumably able to communicate as members of the Society. Nevertheless there is no evidence of widespread general administration of the communion to children as a matter of policy. It is of interest to note that Wesley received Communion himself as a child from seven years of age. From his Oxford days he attempted to communicate at least weekly, and daily in his preparation for the great Christian festivals, especially Christmas.

21. Wesley always insisted upon some evidence of an awareness of the significance of salvation - however basic a child's understanding of this concept might be. To search for some evidence might be truly our concern too but we have an added problem in that many of the children in our congregation may not be baptised. This may be either because their parents have decided to leave baptism until later years or that the parents have little or no church involvement.

V The Pressure for Change

22. Patterns of church life and worship are always changing. Within living memory the normal pattern for church attendance was two services plus afternoon Sunday School. Most Christian families today attend one act of worship each week. There is now greater congregational participation in worship. Many churches have been rediscovering for themselves the centrality of the Lord's Supper in Christian

¹¹ Journal Vol 2 (360-361) quoted by Colin Williams *John Wesley's Theology Today* p164

life and worship. The development of 'Family Worship' in recent years has enabled adults and children to become more aware of one another as members of the worshipping community. This has increased the sense of solidarity in worship. The Church is perceived as a whole family which includes people at every stage of life. To these developments is now added the widely debated issue of the place of children and young people at the Lord's Table.

23. In common with other Churches there has been a growing awareness and appreciation of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church. Thus it is becoming a more common practice for all those present at worship to take part in the service, though not all will communicate. Children are now regularly found at the Lord's Supper gathered round the rail as part of the Christian family. There is also an increasing emphasis on Festival Days as opportunities for a special celebration of the Lord's Supper when children are present throughout.

After such occasions as these children sometimes ask why they cannot receive the bread and wine and some express dissatisfaction at receiving only a blessing. Some ministers, parents and workers with children are finding themselves less and less satisfied with the traditional answer 'when you are old enough to understand'. It is our conviction that the correct approach is to tell the gospel to such young enquirers in ways appropriate to them and then to invite them to share in the Lord's Supper if they desire it. The guidelines give more details of the procedures for admitting children to share in the Lord's Supper.

VI The Ecumenical Dimension

24. While examining this question we have been aware of the thinking and decision of other major Churches currently considering the issue. We instance three.

25. a) The Uniting Church in Australia after considering the issue has adopted the following as the basis for its policy concerning children's participation in the Lord's Supper.

- '(i) Baptism is basic to our understanding of membership and participation in the church.
- (ii) Our understanding of Baptism makes it appropriate for all baptised persons to participate in Holy Communion. It would be inappropriate to prevent any baptised person participating in the Holy Communion.
- (iii) Children do have capacity to participate in Holy Communion, even though their appreciation of the sacrament may be different from that of adults.
- (iv) Confirmation is an important step in our faith pilgrimage, but it should not be seen as the rite of entry either to the church or to the Holy Communion.'

26. b) The Church of Scotland has given considerable thought to children's participation in the Lord's Supper and state the following as their conclusion: 'they (children) belong to the Church and the Church belongs to them. They are not only to be taught but to be ministered to; not only to be educated but to be nurtured; not

only to learn but to worship; not only to receive but to give; truly to be part of today's Church'¹². Arising from this conclusion the following scheme has been suggested in their publication, 'The Lord's Supper and the Children of the Church':

- (i) Normally the children of the Church would have the right to share in the Lord's Supper by virtue of their Baptism.
- (ii) There would be no question of prescribing a lower age limit.
- (iii) Children would begin to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the discretion of their parents.
- (iv) In exceptional circumstances, non-baptised children (or adults for that matter) should be permitted to take the Communion provided that steps are taken to usher the child (or adult) to Baptism thereafter.
- (v) In severing the link between eligibility for Communion and 'joining the Church', the effect would be to stress the significance of both Baptism and Confirmation.'

These guidelines were adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The matter was referred under the terms of the Barrier Act to local presbyteries where it did not receive the required support to go ahead. The matter therefore lies in abeyance.

27. c) In Britain a working party of the General Synod Board of Education of the Church of England presented its report on 'Christian Initiation and Participation in the Eucharist' to the General Synod in November 1985. Its detailed recommendations are based on conclusions that Confirmation is not a necessary prerequisite for admission to Holy Communion and that baptised persons be admitted to Communion before Confirmation. A final decision would follow consultation with the diocesan Bishop, the Parish Council and the local incumbent who must be satisfied that such children receive Christian Education appropriate to their age.

The Synod 'took note of' the report which was sent to the house of Bishops for further consideration.

28. The Lima Document contains major sections on Baptism and Eucharist. It states that baptism gives to Christians 'participation in the community of the Holy Spirit' and looks toward Christian growth, which involves Christian nurture.

The commentary on the text¹³ raises the question of how a further rite can be placed between baptism and the Lord's Supper. It invites Churches who have adopted this practice to ponder whether they have fully appreciated the consequences of baptism. In the section on Eucharist the commentary notes that many Churches are currently discussing 'the inclusion of baptised children as communicants at the Lord's Supper'.

The document will be a resource for Methodist congregations discussing the issue.

¹² Church of Scotland Report: *Children - the Challenge to the Church* p6

¹³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* WCC 1982 p5

VII The Way Ahead

29. Having considered our own tradition, the pressure for change and developments in other Churches, we must address ourselves to the way ahead for the Methodist Church.

We need to develop the thinking in the Faith and Order Reports of 1973 and 1975, and widen our present practices. Christian discipleship is the act of following Christ in a pilgrimage of faith, sharing the experience with others who are engaged in the same venture. A child can be a follower of Jesus and share in the life of the Church from infancy. The Church thus becomes a community of all ages where each contributes to the enrichment of all in being and becoming Christian together. The Sacraments are a sign of God's free grace. They testify to God's initiative in offering himself to us and invite our response in terms of Christian living and personal commitment. Baptism introduces us to the life of the church where at the Lord's Table we are nurtured in faith and encouraged to find and receive the means of grace. Our response which is best made in fellowship with God's people is expressed through sharing in worship, fellowship and service.

30. The children attending Methodist Churches differ considerably in their background. There are churches where virtually all the children attending worship are from the homes of families active in the church. In other churches the majority of children are from non-worshipping families, and this is often the case at Parade services. Whilst some children are regular worshippers, others may be present very occasionally, though at times coinciding with the Lord's Supper.

There are already some churches where children receive the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, but other churches take quite a different approach, believing wisdom lies in the more traditional view of delaying full participation until confirmation and church membership. These variations already cause increasing problems as families and ministers move.

31. It is important for the practice of the local church to be derived from a policy agreed by the Church Council so that developments at local level do not depend on the views only of the Minister or of an influential minority. This report is for guidance and encouragement. It is for the Church Council to decide that church's policy in the light of the local circumstances, of the guidelines in this report, and of the principles and doctrines of the Church to which attention is drawn in this report and elsewhere.

32. It is also important that policies and practice are kept under review both in the local church and Connexionally. The Faith and Order Committee and the Division of Education and Youth will need to be informed by the experience of local churches as to the usefulness and appropriateness of the Guidelines, and the churches are encouraged to write to the Division of Education and Youth on that as well as on other aspects, as experience develops.

VIII Guidelines

A. It is expected as a theological principle that a child to be admitted to communicant participation in the Lord's Supper will have been baptised

The Faith and Order reports, 'Children and the Sacrament of Holy Communion' in 1973 and 1975 take this for granted. It is also the presupposition of those who believe that baptism is itself sufficient for communicant participation in the Lord's Supper, especially in worshipping Christian families where parents and children communicate together.

Others hold the view that not only is Baptism essential, but the child should also show some evidence of faith, expressed in a desire to communicate and awareness, appropriate to the child's age and experience, of the significance of the Lord's Supper.

B. If, from time to time, it is judged appropriate for unbaptised children to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, it is expected that, after due consideration, Baptism will follow

This is first of all a pastoral matter which will involve consultation with children and parents. There should be a sensitive and flexible approach, encouraging a growing faith and not barring anyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ from his table. No-one who comes in faith, irrespective of age or intellectual ability, should be turned away from the means of grace. We should welcome the faith of children and look forward to its further expression in the sacrament of Baptism.

C. The Church Council should satisfy itself that the child shows an awareness of the significance of the Lord's Supper, and the faith response appropriate to the child's age and experience

This should be done informally. It will include consultation between the child, the parent or parents, the minister, and those who work with the child, and it will require evidence of desire on the part of the child to communicate. This should be seen as a part of the normal nurture and teaching programme of the local church.

D. The Church has a responsibility to discriminate and test, but this must not become the opportunity for adults to deprive children of the means of grace simply because they are children

This too calls for great sensitivity. Issues of conscience and of deep conviction should be recognised and understood by all concerned. The final responsibility lies in the decisions of the Church Council and the practices of the local church, but we believe the time has come to move forward and encourage children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper.

E. Children should be encouraged to express their spiritual awareness but they should not be forced to do so.

They may wish to use the framework provided by their religious upbringing, but are equally free to reject it. Similarly some welcome the opportunity that full participation in the Lord's Supper provides to make their faith and a desire for growth a public witness. However, any excess of encouragement or demand to participate must be avoided.

F. It is essential that there should be sufficient explanation and preparation, in relation to age and experience, before the child first communicates

There should be the widest possible involvement of parents, workers with children, the congregation, ministers and children so that the children may be adequately prepared. There should also be adequate continuing support so that the child may grow in understanding of the Lord's Supper.

G. Children participating in the Lord's Supper should have the support of a regular worshipping community

For some this will include their own family, and the nurturing process begun in the worship will be continued and strengthened in the home. For others, whose families do not worship, the church will need to provide this support through adult friends and/or those who work with children.

H. All who receive the bread and wine should be encouraged to grow in a fuller and deeper commitment to Christ and his Church.

Along with John Wesley we believe that the Lord's Supper is a powerful evangelistic opportunity where the gospel is proclaimed in word and symbolic action. Widening the invitation to include children will be in line with the Methodist emphasis on conversion and Christian experience.

J. When a policy has been decided and acted upon in the local church, it is important to keep it under review, and to take account of new children and families joining the church

(Agenda 1987, pp.78-93)

RESOLUTION

The Conference

- a) adopts the report on Children and Holy Communion and, commends it to the Church, and invites local churches to use the Guidelines actively to encourage the fuller participation of children in the Lord's Supper.
- b) directs that, in view of the complexity of the issues and the different views held conscientiously by ministers and members of the church, the matter be kept under regular review by the Division of Education and Youth and the Faith and Order Committee.
- c) directs the Division of Education and Youth to publish this report, and such supporting material as it deems appropriate, including teaching material on the Lord's Supper.
- d) directs that the Guidelines in the report be printed in the Minutes of Conference.

CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION (2000)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 1987 Guidelines

The Methodist Conference has for many years been concerned with the issue of Children and Communion. Two interim reports were considered in the 1970s. The Conference of 1987 adopted the report *Children in Communion*. Its central recommendations were presented in the form of Guidelines for the use of local churches. These Guidelines remain in place. Whilst acknowledging that the final responsibility for what happens in the local church remains with the Church Council, the adopted Report expressed the conviction that *'the time has come to move forward and encourage children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper.'*

1.2 Practice in other churches

Children and Communion is not an issue for the Methodist Church alone. The recent report *Baptism and Church Membership* (Churches Together in England) highlights other ways in which the issues have been addressed. Due account should be taken of this, especially bearing in mind the large number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships [LEPs] in which Methodism shares, in particular with the United Reformed Church and with the Church of England. Alongside this it should be noted that in churches which are not LEPs there will also be people from different denominations and backgrounds (see Section 4).

1.3 Remit of the Working Group

Ten years after *Children in Communion*, a Working Party was given a remit from the then Division of Education and Youth to look at the practice of Methodist churches in the matter of admitting children to Holy Communion. The remit noted that *'there is inconsistency in the interpretation of the guidelines in the 1987 Report and therefore the practice of churches. There is also development in the practice of other churches, with some of whom Methodism has inter-Communion and shared life in LEPs.'* The task of the Working Party was **'to discover what is happening, particularly in the Methodist Church in Britain, and to help the church to address this issue.'**

1.4 What the Group did

The Working Group decided to discover present practice in Methodist churches (including LEPs in which Methodists share) by a direct approach rather than by anecdotal evidence and commissioned a survey to gather this information. The main findings are presented in this Report. In the light of this information and other developments which have occurred within both the Methodist church and other traditions a number of issues have been identified. **It is recommended that the 1987 Guidelines be replaced by the policy set out at the end of this Report.**

2 THE SURVEY

2.1 Research Method

In the summer of 1997 a fully structured self-completion postal questionnaire was sent to a representative sample of ministers in pastoral charge of churches across the connexion. The sample was drawn from the annual statistical data returned through circuits and districts. In order to minimize enquiries of churches with no children those returning five or fewer present in Junior Church were excluded from the sampling frame - reducing its size by 46%. Ministers were asked to complete the questionnaire only with the specified church in their section in mind, thereby ensuring that smaller churches as well as larger ones featured in the research. Where necessary, a reminder letter was sent to encourage ministers to complete the questionnaire. 324 out of 390 ministers replied to the survey - an excellent response rate of 83%. It transpired that some 18% of the churches covered by the survey indicated that they had five children or fewer in their Junior Church when the time came to complete the questionnaire which means that the experience of churches with a small number of children was represented in the survey.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Introducing the Policy

2.2.1.1 Is there a *Children in Communion* policy in place?

69% of Church Councils which were sampled had discussed children in Communion and 56% had agreed a formal policy. Where a policy had not been agreed a further 21% of churches had an informal policy which had not been the subject of Church Council discussion. If this figure is added to the 56% of Church Councils with an agreed policy then 77% of the churches sampled claim to have a policy of some kind.

2.2.1.2 *What policy is in place?*

83% of churches with a policy for children in Communion are offering children the elements either conditionally [43%] or unconditionally [40%].

2.2.1.3 *Who took the initiative for setting the policy?*

Minister	73%
Junior Church Staff	38%
Church Council	11%
Parents	11%

Base: churches with a policy – more than one answer possible

2.2.1.4 **What reservations did churches have about the introduction of the Policy?**

Just over a third of churches had reservations about introducing a policy. In order of importance those identified from a given list were:

Children would not know what is going on
Children would lack proper reverence
We had to wait until we were Church Members to receive Communion and so should the children

The children would disrupt the atmosphere
Base: churches with a policy where reservations were expressed.

2.2.1.5 How was the policy received initially within the church?

Broad acceptance	70%
Significant reservations which were resolved	10%
Significant reservations which persist	5%
Don't know	15%*

Base: churches where children can receive elements either conditionally or unconditionally.

** High because minister may not have been in pastoral charge at time of decision.*

2.2.1.6 What impact did the introduction of the policy have on the congregation?

In order of importance the following benefits were noted from a list provided in the questionnaire:

Encouraged people to think more deeply about matters relating to children in the church	51%
Brought the church family closer together	47%
Children have been made more welcome at worship	45%
Encouraged wider participation in worship	37%
It's as if we have always been doing it	35%
Adults have been helped to think more deeply about the place of Holy Communion in their own life	29%
Sharpened divisions between those for and against	1%

Base: churches where children can receive elements either conditionally or unconditionally.

2.2.1.7 What measures were thought to be important in the introduction of the policy?

The percentage of ministers identifying the following measures as important or very important from a given list was as follows:

Preparation of children in Junior Church groups	67%
Church Council decided on a policy to allow children to receive the elements	60%
Minister talking to the children by themselves	42%
Pastoral preaching to explain the reasons for the decision	40%
Discussion at Worship Consultation	35%
Letter to parents to explain policy	32%

Base: churches where children can receive elements either conditionally or unconditionally – more than one answer possible.

2.2.2 Church Practice

2.2.2.1 When are children present at some point during the service of Holy Communion?

Every time Communion is celebrated	43%)	
Most times when Communion is celebrated	21%)	87%
Family Communion only	23%)	
Never	13%	

Base: all churches sampled.

2.2.2.2 Which parts of the service are children present for?

	'Normal' Communion	Family Communion Service
All of it including the distribution of elements	13%	85%
Only present at the end of worship when the elements are distributed	30%	9%
All except for the middle of the service	21%	6%
Start of worship but not for distribution of elements	36%	nil

Base: where children are present

2.2.2.3 Where a family Communion is celebrated which service books are used?

Sunday Service – adult book	61%
Sunday Service – children's book	31%
Other published material	34%
Own liturgy	45%

More than one answer possible.

2.2.2.4 At what age do children share in different aspects of the service?

	Under 5	6-7	8-11	12-14
Present but do not come forward	nil	nil	nil	nil
Receive a blessing	55%	35%	22%	10%
Receive elements subject to conditions	15%	32%	43%	42%
Receive unconditionally	14%	20%	22%	25%
Not stated	16%	13%	13%	23%

Base: where children are present when the elements are distributed.

2.2.2.5 Where conditions are specified before the elements are offered – what are they?

	All	LEPs
Child must be baptized	17%	46%
Parents must have given consent/not objected	67%	69%
Child must have indicated a desire to receive	80%	77%
Child must have received teaching	63%	54%

Base: Where conditions are applied – more than one answer possible.

2.2.2.6 What is the practice for administering the elements?

Receive with their parents	67%
When parents are not present children receive with adult(s)	53%
Junior Church including staff receive together	55%
Children without parents present receive together	14%

*Base: where children may receive the elements.
More than one answer possible.*

3 DISCUSSION OF ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SURVEY AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The major findings of the survey were reported to the Methodist Council and to the Faith and Order Committee in 1998. Members were invited to reflect upon the implications of the results. In the light of that consultation process and other developments that have occurred since the Guidelines were introduced thirteen years ago, the following issues were identified.

3.1 Diversity – connexionalism or congregationalism

The survey reports a very wide diversity of policy and practice. The 1987 Guidelines place the final responsibility for what happens in the local church with the Church Council. However, nearly a quarter of churches with six or more children present in church on a Sunday morning have not even discussed the policy issue of children in Communion. It must also be recognised that this approach has made possible a diversity of practice that the church now has to address. The 1987 Guidelines have encouraged a congregational rather than connexional approach to what is an important theological and pastoral matter. Some churches do not have children present at any time during the service of Holy Communion whilst others allow children under the age of five to receive the elements without any condition. This wide variation causes difficulties for families and local churches and is clearly at odds with our connexional ethos.

3.2 The importance of uniform practice across the connexion

Only just over half of those churches with six or more children in their Junior Church have a Children in Communion policy which has been agreed by the Church Council. A further quarter of churches claim to have a *de facto* policy, arising usually out of the particular stance of their current minister. The absence of a formal policy places children in a situation of uncertainty, especially when pastoral oversight changes or when they themselves are visitors in another Methodist church. The 1987 Report expressed the conviction that the time had come to move

forward and encourage children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper. The evidence of the survey is that in the thirteen years since then, this has happened to a large extent. The consequences of the diversity of practice in relation to the 1987 guidelines, however, make it necessary to take seriously one of the three possible ways forward:

1. that the Methodist Church abandon any attempt to offer connexional guidelines;
2. that the present policies be left in place [with or without minor changes];
3. that the Conference agree a policy in relation to children and Holy Communion which applies to the whole connexion.

3.3 The positive experience of introducing Children in Communion

The vast majority of churches report positive experiences from the introduction of the policy. The table at 2.2.1.6 shows that the life of the local church will be enriched and adults helped to think more deeply about the place of Holy Communion in their own spirituality. This should encourage churches across the connexion to include children in Holy Communion and to adopt a positive attitude with regard to their inclusion.

3.4 Conditions to receiving Holy Communion

3.4.1 Open Table ?

Many Methodist churches consider themselves to have 'an open Table' and welcome 'all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ', offering bread and wine to those who come with hands outstretched. God's blessing is proclaimed to those who come but do not wish, for whatever reason, to receive the elements [see para 3.6 below]. God's love for both adults and children, for every human being, is demonstrated by the inclusive act of laying hands upon their head, accompanied by appropriate words. It must be acknowledged that the invitation "to all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ" is not historic Methodist practice. At the same time it is very widespread in the modern Church and also has the intention of being inclusive. It might be proper to ask whether or not it is an acceptable development within the life of the Methodist Church. The rightness of it should not be argued solely on the grounds that its practice is widespread. It might be argued out of a desire to be appropriately inclusive. Nevertheless, the invitation is not all-inclusive and unconditional. It offers a criterion by which women and men may judge whether or not they may or may not present themselves at the Lord's Table. 'Love of the Lord Jesus Christ' would permit the participation of people of other denominational traditions with the additional assumption that they are in good standing in their own Church. It would permit the participation and inclusion of those whose mental powers do not allow them to make any rational decision about it for themselves, a decision on their behalf being taken by those who know and love them.

It is undoubtedly true that children are as capable as adults of being included among 'those who love the Lord Jesus Christ'. But other criteria – age, understanding,

preparation and parental consent – are regarded by some as prerequisites before children may receive bread and wine. These are discussed below. First, however, it must be asked whether, for children and adults alike, baptism is a precondition for receiving Communion.

3.4.2 Baptism

The 1987 Guidelines state, as a theological principle, that for a child to be admitted to communicant participation in the Lord's Supper he or she will have been baptized. Where it is discovered that a child has not been baptized, it is expected that after due preparation, baptism will follow. The survey shows that only a small minority of churches make baptism a pre-condition of receiving the elements. Local Ecumenical Partnerships are more likely to impose baptism as a condition. Current practice is at odds with the existing 1987 Guidelines. Baptism remains the rite of entry into the Church and where a child has not been baptized but receives Communion, then baptism should follow as a proper corollary. At present the Church sets out a pattern of Christian initiation that begins with baptism and leads to admission to Holy Communion. In Methodist practice confirmation and reception into membership may take place before or after first Communion. Because in this whole area we are dealing with *a whole process of initiation*, which includes several separable elements, some would argue that provided that the person benefits from both baptism and Holy Communion it does not matter which comes first. The weight of the argument below is, however, that baptism should be required *before* a person receives Holy Communion.

3.4.2.a Holy Communion is by many considered to be a converting ordinance, so that, for some children and adults, the initial reception of Communion in an unbaptized state might well include the desire to be baptized also. If someone were to present himself or herself at the Lord's Table with hands outstretched, the presiding minister knowing this person not to be baptized, this would not be the moment to withhold bread and wine, but it ought immediately to occasion a pastoral conversation to discuss the significance and the consequences of what has happened. This scenario is more likely to apply to adults than to children, but would apply equally well if children, known not to be baptized, were to present themselves with open hands. In the case of children the pastoral conversation would need also to include their parents, whatever the parents' relationship with the Church might be [see below, para 3.4.4].

3.4.2.b It should be noted that when people claim that Holy Communion is a converting ordinance they often believe that this idea derives, in the form in which they express it, from the teaching of John Wesley, i.e. that it is a proclamation of the Gospel and can elicit a response. However, Wesley's use of the phrase 'a converting ordinance' denoted his belief that someone 'seeking salvation' might find it in Communion. Baptism was none the less for him the condition for presenting oneself at Holy Communion.

3.4.2.c The many documents produced in bilateral conversations involving Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Anglicans attest that baptism should always be a precondition for the reception of Holy Communion. The practice in these and other Churches is described below [4.1 – 4.6].

3.4.3 Preparation

It is often objected that children should not be admitted to Holy Communion because they do not *understand* what they are doing. Adults, however, do not *understand* in any ultimate sense what happens at the Lord's Table, but such a realisation does not mean that no attempt should be made to understand. All ought to seek understanding in the measure that is possible. Preparation to receive Communion can only be a benefit. [See the Survey 2.2.1.7.] There is some evidence in the Survey that the discussion of the possibility of children participating in Holy Communion has raised the level of adult awareness of dimensions of sacramental theology previously neglected. There is a need for regular preaching about the Sacraments as well as for opportunity to discuss their significance in fellowship groups. Children in common with everyone else can only be enriched by being taught the significance of the Sacraments of the Gospel. The chance to speak of baptism as well as Holy Communion should be seized. Learning opportunities might appropriately be created by the minister in pastoral charge, by local preachers, and by leaders of the Junior Church, who themselves may feel the need for help in this task. This cannot be considered a one-off duty which enables children to participate in Holy Communion. It ought to become a considered part of the learning programme of the whole Church, in which understanding is honed or enlarged. Nevertheless, whilst a high level of preparation is desirable for those participating in Holy Communion, *understanding* should not in itself be considered a pre-condition.

3.4.4 Parental agreement

The Survey indicates that before children are allowed to participate in Holy Communion, more than two thirds of churches insist that the parents must either have given their consent or not objected. This raises two separate but related issues. Firstly, there are problems in the case where children come to church without their parents. Often the parents have little or no contact with the church and do not know what happens there. It may be considered unreasonable to ask them to express a view as to whether their child should receive Communion. The attempt to explain why they are being asked for permission may in itself be an evangelistic opportunity, giving access, for a focused reason, to a home which might otherwise remain unvisited. However, their rights as parents must be respected, whatever the outcome of the conversation. Secondly, there are problems of cutting across parental authority, where parents, who are present at and themselves receive Holy Communion, do not want their children to receive. Their views too must be respected. They should be encouraged to allow their children to accompany them to the communion rail to be offered a blessing. Nevertheless parents should always be encouraged to take seriously the rights and opinions of the child in reaching their own conclusions.

3.4.5 Age

The table at 2.2.2.4 shows that the likelihood of a child being offered the bread and wine increases with the child's age. Guideline D [1987 Report] states that the Church has a responsibility to discriminate and test but this must not become the opportunity for adults to deprive children of 'the means of grace simply because they are children.'

3.5 Practice

3.5.1 How widespread is the practice of children being present during the service of Holy Communion?

The table at 2.2.2.1 shows that the vast majority (87%) of churches surveyed allow children to be present at some point during the service of Holy Communion.

3.5.2 For which parts of the service are they present?

The table at 2.2.2.2 shows that where children are present at some point in the normal Communion service, just under two thirds of them witness the sharing of bread and wine. A third are not present for the prayer of thanksgiving and the distribution of the elements. They do not experience the climax of the liturgy. Whether children receive a blessing or the bread and wine, it is vital to a child's spiritual development that s/he should experience the moment when, receiving the Body of Christ, the Body of Christ is built up in faith and unity. Family Communion Services are relatively infrequent. Additional opportunities should be given for children to be present at the climax of the service.

3.5.3 Use of local liturgy

The table at 2.2.2.3 shows that whilst the Sunday Service was being widely used at Family Communions, other books or the local church's own liturgy are also being used quite extensively. This variety reflects a tension within the whole Church between on the one hand ensuring consistency of theology in our liturgy and not wishing on the other to stifle the creativity of those who wish to use their own words. There could be a proliferation of liturgies that could be theologically inadequate. The Conference guidelines on the creation of local liturgies will be helpful here and the advent of the Methodist Worship Book may change the situation radically.

3.5.4 Provision of support material

The Methodist Worship Book contains a number of services of Holy Communion, at all of which it is hoped that children will at some time be present. With such variety it is not possible to produce a single illustrated order of service of the kind previously available. Other ways of providing support material for children are being developed.

3.6 The place of the blessing in Holy Communion

Although the survey conducted supports the conclusion that it is time to move forward and encourage children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper, it still remains an option that anyone, young or old, may come and seek a blessing when he or she is not able or does not wish, for whatever reason, to receive the elements. Blessing itself is a many-layered concept with rich tones which needs to be rescued from trivialization. It is a celebration of the presence of God in and with his world, which in essence includes all people. There is no single, finished definition of blessing in the Scriptures but it is best understood in terms of gift, building as it does on categories of relationship, presence and community solidarity. It is available to all, however tentative their faith in God, including, in our secular society, those whose belief is a mere residual trace. It would make no sense for someone who categorically refuses belief in God to offer himself or herself for

blessing, i.e. ask God to make actual that potential which lies within them. It is, however, entirely appropriate for a person of faith to say words of blessing to others as an expression of the fact that God is with them even if the person receiving the blessing does not reciprocate God's offer of relationship. Blessing is a declaration of God's purpose for his children. It is the assertion that God is favourably disposed towards all, that nobody is excluded from God's intention. God wants everyone and everything he has made to flourish, grow and prosper. To bless someone in the name of God, for it is always God who blesses, is to declare to those addressed that they share an inheritance which is offered to all.

4 PRACTICE IN OTHER CHURCHES

Baptism and Church Membership with particular reference to Local Ecumenical Partnerships (CTE 1997) explores issues of Baptism, membership and admission to Communion among those churches which are frequent partners in LEPs. At least four different patterns of initiation are noted. All these patterns involve a process of initiation which includes different elements (God's call to faith, preparation, nurture, prayer for the gift of the Spirit, profession of faith, baptism, reception into membership of the church, admission to Communion) but in varying sequence.

4.1 The Orthodox Churches

In the Orthodox churches, baptism and chrismation [anointing with oil consecrated by a bishop] is immediately followed by admission to Communion, at whatever age a person is baptized. Infant baptism, with chrismation and first Communion, is the norm. The importance of the link between baptism, chrismation and Communion is shown by the fact that, when baptism does not take place at a time when Holy Communion is being celebrated, those who have been baptized and anointed are given the elements from the reserved sacrament. The Orthodox practice is close to that of the early Church, in which baptism, anointing [and/or laying on of hands] and admission to Communion were part of a unified rite of Christian initiation.

4.2 The Roman Catholic Church

One Bread, One Body [1998], a teaching document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church, issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, urges Catholics 'to refresh and renew their belief in the Eucharist, their understanding of Catholic teaching, and their reverence for this great mystery of faith.' The document describes Baptism as 'the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. It is a point of departure, a sacred beginning to membership of the Pilgrim Church... Receiving Holy Communion is the climax of the process of initiation begun by Baptism.' [18]

'At nearly every Catholic celebration of Mass there are people in differing degrees of spiritual and visible communion with the community gathered there... who know that they are taking part in a real way even though they may not receive Communion. There are unbaptized people being prepared to be initiated into the Church, as well as baptized Christians on the way towards Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. There are young children who are not yet ready to receive their first Holy Communion.' [42]

'When young children make their first Holy Communion, they too are brought into a new and deepened communion with the Catholic Church.' [54]

In the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales it is usual for baptized children to be prepared to receive their 'First Communion' at the age of 7 or 8. Confirmation normally follows after further specific teaching and preparation in the early teens. In the Salford diocese, however, there is a practice of confirming at about the age of seven children who are only then admitted to Communion for the first time.

4.3 The Church of England

The House of Bishops of the Church of England has issued guidelines on the admission of baptized persons to Holy Communion before confirmation (GS 1212). Guideline C states, "Before admitting a person to Communion, the priest must seek evidence of Baptism. Baptism always precedes admission to Communion." This absolute requirement of Baptism carries weight in Local Ecumenical Partnerships involving Anglicans. The issue is highlighted in LEPs where eucharistic forms of worship may be held as the main Sunday morning service on two or three weeks out of four.

4.4 Baptist Churches

In Baptist churches there is little evidence of the desire for or expectation that children will be admitted to Communion prior to Believers' Baptism. Services of Holy Communion are normally held roughly once a month. Whether to offer bread and wine to those not baptized is a matter for congregational decision.

4.5 The Church of Scotland

In the Church of Scotland a growing number of local congregations are deciding to admit baptized children to Communion prior to their being received into membership. This trend is accompanied by a move towards more frequent eucharistic celebration.

4.6 The United Reformed Church

The United Reformed Church offers two routes to full membership of the church: by infant baptism and later confirmation, or by believers' baptism incorporating confirmation. Local congregations are encouraged to consider the admission of baptized children to Communion before confirmation and to determine local policy. A significant number of congregations are doing so, though local practice varies. This is a live issue within the United Reformed Church.

4.7 Recommendations of report of Churches Together in England - *Baptism and Church Membership*

The ecumenical working party recommended inter alia:

4.7.1 The child in the church

We recommend that this renewed concern about the place of the child in the church, with the Christian nurture of children and the whole catechetical process, should be tackled by the churches working together [Recommendation 39].

4.7.2 The admission of children to Communion

We invite all churches to take the situation of LEPs into account as they come to a mind on the admission of young children to Communion [Recommendation 90].

It is also recommended that clear agreements should be established on admission of children to Communion before LEP constitutions are drawn up or when they are reviewed [Recommendation 65 (a) and (b)].

The need for pastoral sensitivity and a degree of flexibility in difficult cases was recognised [Recommendation 65 (c)].

5 FUTURE METHODIST POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 that it be considered normal practice for baptized children, as members of the whole Body of Christ, to participate in Holy Communion by receiving bread and wine, irrespective of age.

The 1987 Guidelines encouraged Church Councils to allow children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper. Many churches have adopted this practice but others have not. As a result we have a diversity of practice across the connexion leading to pastoral anomalies which cause misunderstanding and distress. Also for good theological and pastoral reasons once a child has been admitted to Holy Communion the decision ought not to be reversed, except for matters of discipline. Where children have been fully admitted to Communion there have been widespread spiritual benefits for the whole congregation. The time has come for these benefits to be experienced across the whole connexion. The worthiness of anyone to receive the Body and Blood of Christ is based solely on the grace of God. A baptized person has by the grace of God been incorporated into the Body of Christ, his Church. It is appropriate therefore that any baptized member of the Body be fed. Conditions relating to age and level of understanding should be set aside.

5.2 that children and adults who receive Holy Communion, if not already baptized, be encouraged to be baptized

'Baptism marks entry into the One Catholic and Apostolic Church' (*The Methodist Worship Book*, page 60). The 1987 Guidelines 'expected as a theological principle that a child to be admitted to communicant participation in the Lord's Supper will have been baptized'. That principle should be maintained and should be applied, of course, to adults as well as to children. The 1987 Guidelines also stated that 'if, from time to time, it is judged appropriate for unbaptized children to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, it is expected that, after due consideration, baptism will follow'. That expectation should also remain, and again should apply both to children and to adults. It is inconceivable that a person holding out her/his hands would, at that moment, be refused bread and wine. If it is subsequently discovered that an unbaptized person, of whatever age, has presented himself/herself at Holy Communion, a pastoral conversation should follow without undue delay.

The survey reveals that only a small number of Methodist churches have followed the 1987 Guidelines in recognizing the connection between entry into the Church through baptism and receiving Holy Communion, though the figure is substantially higher in LEPs (see 2.2.2.5). The publication of this report provides an opportunity

for all churches to ensure that their practice accords with the connexional policy set out in the above recommendation.

5.3 that opportunities for learning about the significance of the Sacraments be a considered and integrated part of the Church's life

The consideration of the meaning of baptism as well as the significance of the Lord's Supper would help local congregations to take seriously the relationship between the two. Adequate preparation of both children and adults to receive baptism and to participate regularly in the celebration of Holy Communion requires the use of appropriate study material.

5.4 that the consent of a child's parents be sought before that child is allowed to receive the elements

The responsibilities of parents must be maintained even when they come to a decision which the members of the local congregation regret. The possibility of causing strife in the home by the mere raising of the question has to be recognized and handled sensitively. How the consent of the parents is sought will also need careful thought locally. The opportunity of visiting the home with the possibility of serious conversation about a central Christian issue should not be neglected. Yet it is also very important to acknowledge that children, too, have a legitimate point of view. Their voice should be heard and given due weight in conversations which relate to them.

5.5 that Methodist members of Local Ecumenical Partnerships be asked to exercise 'Ecumenical Restraint' rather than cause undue difficulties for sisters and brothers in another denominational tradition by insisting on their freedom in this matter

There are many documents emerging in many Churches nowadays seeking the admission of children to Holy Communion. Some have not yet come to a conclusion. Methodists might hope that the production and adoption of this report will lead to a wider ecumenical agreement, but for the moment accept the constraints which our relationships with other Churches impose.

5.6 that more opportunities be provided for adults and children to share together in the whole service of Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is the focal act of Christian worship, where the Body of Christ is gathered. Adults and children should be able to receive Holy Communion together whenever it is celebrated. Children need to experience the service in its wholeness.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts the report.

iii) Extended Communion

EXTENDING COMMUNION (1984)

The matter was brought to our attention in a Division of Home Mission paper 'Action and Ideas in Mission', March 1981. David Bridge wrote as follows:

'Rev David Smethurst found himself in Ulverston as a parish priest ministering to a community that had, until recently, been served by five clergy. A particular problem concerned the celebration of Holy Communion. In addition to having responsibility for more than one Church, the priest wishes to take communion to other groups such as people in hospital, the sick and the housebound.

It was already the practice, when celebrating communion with a large congregation, for the priest to be assisted by duly authorised helpers in distributing the elements. What was the difference, it was asked, between taking the elements a few yards down an aisle or a few miles down the road? So developed the concept of 'extended communion', with the priest celebrating at one place in the parish (usually, but not always, in the parish Church) and the congregation being scattered over an area of many square miles. The elements are taken in suitable containers and appropriate additions are made in the orders of service in both sending and receiving churches to indicate that people are sharing in one service although separated by distance from many of their fellow worshippers.

Methodists should reflect on whether an adaptation of the same principle might not have great value for us. Some may have to overcome a prejudice against a practice which might remind them of the 'reserved Sacrament'. Yet the fact remains that we do have a problem which might be tackled in some radical manner like this. Many of our small country chapels do not have sufficient opportunities to share in Holy Communion. Our ministers do have difficulty in giving Communion to all who would like to receive it at the major Christian festivals. We value the concept of the Circuit yet regret that there are insufficient opportunities to give the concept substance. Further, we have in the order of Local Preacher, men and women who are already trained and qualified to conduct worship services. What prevents us from holding regular Circuit Communion Services at which the bread the wine would be taken from one church, not always the head of the Circuit, to the other churches; thus enabling our people to receive the Sacrament and to affirm their Circuit fellowship together?

This is an ancient custom. The first evidence for it is found in the First Apology of Justin Martyr (c.AD 150):

' . . . when the President has celebrated the Eucharist and all the people have assented (i.e. by saying Amen), they whom we call

deacons give to each of those who are present a portion of the Eucharistic bread, and wine, and water; and carry them to those who are absent.'

Reasons are not given. The absent are not necessarily sick. They may have been prevented from attending by the demands of non-Christian society. They must have been baptised and fully initiated into the Christian Assembly. The implication would seem to be that there is but one Eucharist, and those who cannot be present should not receive from private celebrations but from the one true altar.

In times of persecution – before the 'peace of the Church' –the faithful were permitted to take the Eucharist into their own homes and give themselves communion. Reservation in the priest's house or in the Church was introduced for sick communion and regulated by the first Lateran Council of 1215 when it had already been the custom for many centuries. As the sacred species became increasingly objects of devotion, the cult of the reserved Sacrament became part of the life of medieval Christendom, to be abolished in the Churches of the Reformation.

Communion for the sick, however, was permitted by Lutherans, Anglicans and Calvin himself, though Calvinists and Puritans believed that it was unscriptural (not for instance mentioned in *James* 5:13ff) and unnecessary, for if a believer had been faithful to the ordinances in health, their efficacy would not need the additional tincture of communion in sickness or extremity. The Sacraments are Sacraments of the Church and belong to the gathered congregation. The Puritans opposed extended communion for the very reason that Justin admitted it – because the Sacrament was the sign and seal of unity and there was but one table.

The Wesleys believed that sick communion was an important part of pastoral ministry, and conducted celebrations in the homes of the sick and dying. 'Extended communion' might not have been practicable, owing to the hostility of some parish priests, but Wesley also used sick communions to enable the participation of Methodists who might otherwise be deprived of the Sacrament. On one occasion at least, as many as forty persons were present and received the Sacrament. In his revised Prayer Book of 1784-8, Wesley included the office for the Communion of the Sick. He made some editorial changes as was his wont. There is an introductory Collect, Epistle and Gospel, and then the Prayer Book service from the General Confession; but Wesley omits all the rubrics except:

At the time of the distribution of the Holy Sacrament, the Elder shall first receive the Communion himself, and after minister unto them that are appointed to communicate with the sick, and last of all to the sick person.

This tradition has remained in Methodism and although recent service books have not included an order, there was published circa 1955 an authorised office. This was in the style of the 1936 *Book of Offices* and the Book of Common Prayer.

The practice may not seem of the Methodist ethos, though there are interesting Primitive Methodist parallels in 1841 and some ministers have communicated the sick from elements consecrated at say the Easter Communion. This has been confined to the sick, those in hospital and the house-bound.

It is impossible to condemn the practice, not only because the precedent is so old, but because its theological justification is very strong. It preserves the unity of the Church, and means that there is no danger of communion of the sick being a private mass, or – as could be a danger in our time – an act of schism.

The unity of the celebration takes precedence over the needs of the deprived. They are not to go without communion but the full rite takes place in the congregation. The importance of this cannot be over-estimated. Were there to be celebrations in groups throughout a neighbourhood, there might be a danger of rival Eucharists and people might gravitate to their best friends or those of like opinions. It is understandable that meetings for fellowship should at times wish to have the Lord's Supper for themselves, to express their life in Christ and the intimacy of their union, and to give thanks for its blessings. They will often say that the Sacrament is more real to them than in the larger numbers and greater formality of the Sunday worship. This is good, but it has its danger of cliquishness, if not worse. It is even more necessary that these gather sometimes, in their groups, for a celebration in Church – that they may realise their nearness with the greater company in that place. Then the unavoidably absent might be included in the ancient way.

The argument against extended communion is that the Eucharist action is a **whole** and that is not satisfactory for those absent through sickness or any other cause, simply to receive communion and not share, however briefly, in the Church's total thanksgiving and remembrance. It is vital for our people to understand that **communion** is but a part of the Eucharist action and that it needs to be placed in the context of the work of God in Christ which the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist 'brings to every thankful mind'.

It is doubtful if extended communion is a satisfactory way of dealing with deprivation, or one which would commend itself to the majority of Methodists. Our custom is to solve the problem by giving dispensations to probationer ministers, deaconesses or lay persons. There is division among us as to whether this is a regrettable necessity to be adopted with the greatest caution, or whether it is a way of asserting the priesthood of all believers; but it is not our brief to discuss this. There is also the matter of how widespread is a sense of deprivation in our far flung chapels. Has the recognition of the centrality of the Eucharist so established itself among our rural churches that there is desire for it on more frequent occasions than the Minister's monthly visit? Is not the Word wanted as the regular weekly diet with the Sacrament, though a solemn obligation, less frequently?

Our conclusions are as follows:

1. Extended communion should usually be confined to those who cannot attend the Church's celebration, e.g., the sick and housebound. If it is at all possible, the infirm or disabled should be transported to Church. For some of them this could have great benefits.
2. There may be something to be said for an occasional extension of communion as a symbol of the unity of the Church, but this would require careful preparation and preliminary teaching. It does not seem to us to be the kind of symbolic action which would immediately appeal to our people or to be the best way of uniting scattered societies. It would also need to be

hedged about with many safeguards to avoid irreverence on the one hand, or an almost superstitious regard for the elements on the other. If it is practised we would suggest it be done as follows:

- i. The elements should be taken from the table in Church in appropriate containers.
- ii. Communion should be in both kinds, though in some cases intinction – the dipping of the bread in the wine – may be advisable.
- iii. Those who take them should be given some instruction beforehand.
- iv. The order of Service in the house should be as follows:

A greeting.

A sentence of Scripture and the giving of the Peace.

Prayer

The words of delivery: The Body of Christ given for you OR The Body of Christ keep you in eternal life. Similarly over the cup.

A short concluding prayer (extempore but including thanks for the fellowship of the Church in Christ and for the anticipation of the feast in the Kingdom of God).

The Grace.

3. House communions, as distinct from sick communions, are appropriate in the following circumstances.
 - i. Where it is impossible for people to attend the Church's celebration. This certainly should restrict House Communion on Sundays.
 - ii. As a supplement to Sunday Worship in Church where communion is desired during the week and where there is no midweek celebration in Church. These should always be open to those not in a particular group or neighbourhood and should appear in the Church's weekly announcements. The Communion Service in the Methodist Conference, at marriages, or in teams of ministers or in colleges fall into this category.
4. **Nothing must diminish the proper sense that the Eucharist is the act of the whole Church in obedience to Christ's command and in celebration of the Gospel of God.**

RESOLUTION

That the Conference adopt this statement on Extending Holy Communion.

(Agenda 1984, pp. 28-31)

4 MINISTRIES

blank

(i) The People of God

THE MINISTRY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1986)

INTRODUCTION

The Faith and Order Committee reported to the Conference of 1983 that a working party had been set up to study *The Ministry of the People of God*, 'taking account of all the work already done in this area by the Division of Ministries and the committee's own study on Vocation' (*Agenda* p.62).

In 1984 the Conference accepted the suggestion of the President's Council, commenting on a diversity of views regarding the introduction of episcopacy into Methodism after the failure of the Covenanting proposals, that the period following the judgment of the Conference concerning the report on *The Ministry of the People of God* 'will provide an appropriate context for discussing the possible acceptance within Methodism of various forms of ministry that are compatible with the understanding of ministry that the Conference has adopted' (*Agenda* p.14).

The report of the President's Council noted in the same context that the Conference was committed to making a response in 1985 to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* statement. In similar vein, the Division of Ministries reported to the Conference of 1984 that the policy of its Board was that 'no further recommendation for the diversification of ministries be brought to Conference until it had defined its response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the report on *The Ministry of the People of God* to be brought by the Faith and Order Committee' (*Agenda* p.210).

SECTION A: THE CONTEXT OF THE DISCUSSION OF MINISTRY

001 The Conference last adopted a report on ministry in 1974. It was entitled *Ordination*. That theme highlighted a recurrent concern which, because of its very complexity, merits reconsideration a decade later. A number of developments and concerns lead us to a fundamental re-examination of the ministry of God's people. We set out a number of items which, we believe, indicate the direction in which the Spirit is moving the church.

002 Emerging creative pressures

(a) A positive pressure is the church's increasing concern for and confidence in pursuing its mission. The emergence of a multi-faith society in the UK and more acutely the developing awareness of the secularity of the modern world have drawn forth new resources of imagination and courage. The Conference report *Sharing in God's Mission* (1985) examines the meaning of the church's mission and encourages the church to devise strategies for mission. This programme will require the use and development of all the manifold gifts of the whole people of God. Many Methodists aspire to understand their

ministries in fresh ways; to explore new forms of Christian community and Christian proclamation; or to offer themselves to the church's mission for full-time or part-time paid employment. In this last instance, the offer of paid service may not fall along the lines of our traditional authorised ministries (ordained minister, local preacher, class leader or pastoral visitor, or worker with children or young people; see SO 581 (1) and (2)).

003 (b) The emergence of the charismatic movement in Methodism has 'encouraged Christians to expect and use the many gifts the Spirit gives, for building up the Body of Christ, and for witness and service to Christ in the world. These gifts include some which have been commonly neglected or under-valued in the church – for example, gifts of healing, prophecy, discernment and speaking in tongues. The most balanced exponents of the movement have, however, stressed that these in some ways more spectacular gifts must not detract from the centrality of gifts of caring, ministry, and humble service' (Dr J. Newton, *The Charismatic Movement in the Life of the Church*, a paper commissioned by the President's Council; *Agenda*, 1983, p.17).

004 (c) One significant aspect of the church's rediscovery of the priority of mission is summarised in the phrase 'Mission Alongside the Poor'. In calling for new awareness of the church's responsibility to share God's 'bias to the poor' and new resources to fund the programme of work, the Conference has introduced into Methodism an emphasis which may produce a radical redeployment of our *normal* resources of personnel and finance. If stationing policy should be significantly altered better to express a strategy for mission, we shall need new ways of understanding how God calls into new life the latent skills, commitment and personal qualities of all his people. Only in this way, with limited resources, can we both initiate the new things God lays upon us and nurture the treasures in our contemporary church life.

005 'Ministry' and 'Vocation' – issues only for the ordained?

The following are some of the issues raised when Methodists consider the calling to the ordained ministry. (a) How do we know how many ordained ministers we shall need in the future? What picture of the church and of the ordained ministry is presupposed? (b) The impression is too easily conveyed that 'vocation' is peculiar to ordination, and plays no part in the self-understanding and choices about work of those who are not ordained. (c) Is 'minister' a useful piece of short-hand for an ordained person? Does it not imply that those who are not ordained are not ministers?

006 The heritage of ecumenical debates about ministry

Church unity discussions have occupied much time and energy in recent decades. The failure of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Proposals (1983) may to an extent be attributed to problems in the theology of ordination unsolved for centuries.

007 In 1985 the Conference formulated its response to the WCC statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. While welcoming much of the material about ministry in this statement, it judged that 'too much space is devoted to the ordained ministry', and affirmed 'greater attention to the ministry of the

whole people of God might have revealed a convergence that would have facilitated discussion of the vexed questions relating to ordination' (*Agenda*, pp.572, 581).

008 **Haphazard developments in non-ordained ministries**

Without systematic reflection on the ministries of the non-ordained, the church is left with pragmatic, *ad hoc* developments. Methodism has had a goodly number of these in recent years. For example: the decision not to recruit further to the Wesley Deaconess Order (1978); the emergence of lay pastoral assistants working full-time or part-time in circuits under the direction of the Superintendent and within the terms of an agreed contract; the participation of non-ordained people with ordained persons in leadership teams and in experimental local church constitutions; and the confused discussion of the proposal to create an order of deacons within Methodism.

009 **Haphazard developments in ordained ministry**

While so much energy has been diverted to discussion of ordination in inter-church debate, little energy has remained for careful reflection upon the development of ordained ministry *within* Methodism. The result is a confusing array of discussions, decisions and developments. For example,

(a) The 1978 Conference refused to institute a local ordained ministry but agreed a notice of motion which declared that 'the coming great church will be congregational, presbyteral and episcopal in its life and order.' In 1981 the Conference recommended for study a report on *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, and this matter has not yet been resolved (*Agenda*, 1984, pp.14-16).

(b) In many parts of the church's life, team ministries or collaborative ministry has become an important theme. But CPD offers no definition of team ministry, nor any insight about the relationship of team ministry to circuit ministry. The HM Division recognises certain team ministries (SO 540(3)), but the Stations do not.

(c) Conversely, informal evidence suggests that in many circuits ministers have become increasingly confined to the section of their circuit where they have pastoral charge, and decreasingly 'circuit conscious'.

(d) Women have been ordained in the Methodist Church since 1974, but there has been little discussion of how our understanding and practice of ordained ministry should be influenced by our experience of the ordained constituting a community of women and men.

SECTION B: EXPLORING THE TRADITION

010 **In this section we examine notions such as ministry, vocation and leadership, giving special attention to the way these and related themes occur in the Bible and touching on aspects of their development in the history of the church. These discussions provide a pattern of thinking with which to review our understanding of ordination.**

B.1 MINISTRY

011 The ministry of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the revealer and focus of God's mission in and to the entire created order. Jesus Christ proclaimed and enacted God's saving love for creation; he articulated and lived out the human response which God desires and God's love makes possible – love of God and love of one's fellow human beings (Mark 12:28-31; Matt 5:43-48). The words of Jesus, his actions, his passion and death on the cross together constituted his ministry (Mark 10:45).

012 In the ancient world, the word 'ministry' represented menial and lowly tasks; originally a minister was a waiter at table. Jesus consistently emphasised that the proclamation of God's kingdom and obedience of God's will required humble and costly love (Luke 22:25-27; John 13:1-17).

013 The ministry of the church

The church of Jesus Christ has come into being as a result of God's free and sovereign choice (Eph 1:4). God's spirit creates, sustains and guides the church. The aims of the church on earth are:

to worship God who has graciously revealed himself and effected salvation for the world in Jesus Christ (Col 3:16-17);

faithfully to participate as a community in God's continuing mission to the world (Matt 28:18-20; 1 Peter 2:9).

to enable its members to build up one another in faith, hope and obedient love (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-13).

These aims constitute the church's ministry. The authenticity of the church's ministry is judged by its desire and capacity for witnessing to Jesus Christ.

014 Faith and ministry

The church comprises all who respond in faith to God's mercy in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-10). By faith we become new beings in Christ; we enter a new life in the Spirit and in the fellowship of God's people. The Spirit sanctifies us (1 Cor 6:11; 1 Thess 5:23), makes us God's saints, set apart for God's service (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Our service, or ministry, is the life of love for God and for others which the Spirit makes possible (Rom 5:5). Thus every Christian at the time of being called to faith (1 Cor 1:26) is called also to ministry. This is the *general calling into ministry of the people of God*: all Christians, in receiving God's grace, hear also God's demand to become transformed into the image of Christ, who is Lord and who is perfect love (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Cor 13:1-14:1; Mark 10:42-45; Gal 5:13).

015 Ministry in the world and in the church

In the New Testament period, converts heard the apostolic preaching and became linked with the worshipping community. Baptism was the way of entering the church; it also focused powerfully the relationship between God's saving grace, the response of faith and the commissioning which all Christians receive to a life of love and service (para. 014; Acts 2:38, 10:37-38;

Rom 6:1-14; 1 Cor 12:13). Within the continuing worship of the churches, the early Christians experienced activities and relationships which symbolised life in the kingdom of God. Prominent among them were the generous sharing of gifts and possessions (Rom 12:8; Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37); slaves and free persons sharing equally in the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:23-34); and the welcome of Gentiles and Jews into the people of God on the same terms (Acts 10-11; Gal 2:1-9, 3:28). None of these was without controversy (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:11-21).

- 016 The community at worship provided metaphors which illuminated God's call to ministry in daily life and work, as well as in the church. Obedience to God in the world was perceived as a sacrificial offering to God (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:18-21), analogous to the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving in the worship of the church (Heb 13:15). In general, cultic language was transferred to the total life of the whole people of God. All Christians without distinction were by one author called priests (Rev 1:6), or were said by another author to constitute a priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 10). Christians as Spirit-filled individuals or as a spiritual community became God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:21-22). This theme was built upon the insight that God's presence was not confined to the church at worship, but was available everywhere (John 4:20-24), so that traditional distinctions between sacred and profane were transcended (Hebrews, *passim*), or at least drastically altered (2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Matt 7:6).
- 017 There were, however, practical distinctions between the outworking of Christian ministry in the world and in the church. In the world, Christians were dispersed and involved in groups and institutions dedicated to ends other than the glory of God in Jesus Christ (section B.2). Each church was a gathering in community of Christian believers, with its own internal needs and distinct functions in the service of God's mission (Section B.3).

B.2 CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES IN DAILY LIFE AND WORK

018 The New Testament picture

The New Testament letters gave more attention to the nurture of the church than to Christian discipleship in the world. This emphasis reflected the early churches' most urgent needs; it reflected also the minority status of Christians in the secular world, and their expectation in the near future of the Lord's return and the consummation of God's kingdom. General ethical advice was given about life in the world (Rom 12:14-21, 13:1-7), which in some writings was expressed almost as codified Christian wisdom for living within secular institutions (Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 4:21-6:9; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7). Paul was especially concerned for Christians to make a good impression in the world (1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Cor 6:1-6, 10-32).

019 Historical perspectives

In the early centuries of the church, discussion of daily life and work continued largely to emphasise the general notion of being a Christian wherever the individual happened to be in society (para. 014). As far as the evidence allows us to judge, relatively little attention was given to helping

individual Christians to face the question of where God wanted them to be and what God wanted them to do in society (a specific 'secular vocation', i.e. a vocation as a Christian centred upon daily life and work in the world); or to become aware of distinctive gifts which God had given them for the service of others (a specific ministry in society).

- 020 In the medieval period 'vocation' tended to develop a sense referring to God's call to a life of holiness which could be practised only by the ordained clergy or in the religious orders. The religious orders were open to the non-ordained, but over the centuries the membership of the male orders became increasingly clerical. To avoid this contraction of the idea of vocation Martin Luther encouraged the abolition of the religious orders.
- 021 Luther also maintained the view that a person's social position, civic duties and daily work were a gift of divine providence. He argued that the word 'vocation' should refer to every Christian, ordained and non-ordained alike. Christians were thus encouraged to see that their occupations were to be performed in Christian love as an act of obedience to God. This way of thinking was one aspect of the notion of the priesthood of all believers. Within the Lutheran Church 150 years were to pass before Philipp Spener developed that theme on a considerable scale and gave it particular expression in Pietism.
- 022 In other streams of Protestant thought, notably the Reformed tradition, importance was attached to the discernment of and the honest and undistracted pursuit of a Christian's calling, which was now identified with paid employment. This sometimes left little room for sympathy with the plight of the unemployed or of those who were able to obtain only casual employment.
- 023 In Lutheran and Reformed thought a strong sense of vocation attached to the person who was called to pastoral charge of a congregation. In him vocation in its highest sense, pastoral charge and a revised notion of 'clerical order' came together. This clear picture of the ordained person was less characteristic of the Church of England, which continued to have a body of ordained persons who were not in pastoral charge, a lingering echo of medieval traditions. Methodism has cause to be grateful for this phenomenon, because it gave us John and Charles Wesley.
- 024 Methodism after the Wesleys largely adopted the Protestant pattern in which a strong sense of vocation is attributed to an ordained person who is set apart full-time in pastoral charge. Understanding of ordained ministry in Methodism has been influenced by many diverse developments in social life and theological fashion, and its deployment has been amended accordingly. A corporate discipline linked to the idea of an 'order' has provided continuity.
- 025 Methodists, however, have not normally followed classical Protestantism in using the vocabulary of 'vocation' to refer to the self-understanding of non-ordained church members as they reflected on the relation of their faith to their daily work, and increasingly to their daily leisure. This does not mean that patterns of occupation and leisure activity did not emerge which were characteristic of Methodists. They made significant contributions to the development of the trade unions, to social reform and political life at all levels;

they found their way, as did many other Christians, into the developing 'caring' professions, such as teaching, medicine and nursing. In their leisure they worked with children and young people, and showed a special care for the elderly and the destitute.

026 **Secular vocation today**

In contemporary society a bewildering range of opportunities and frustrations face Christian people as they attempt to discern particular jobs or activities about which they say, 'God has called me to this.' That all life should be dedicated to the way of humble and costly love is clear (para. 014). But how are choices to be made between one career and another? On what criteria does a mother or father balance competing claims between career development and bringing up a family? How does paid employment relate to leisure or to community service? What meaning can be given to a potential career cut short by unemployment or the rapidly changing needs of society?

- 027 The church needs constantly to develop pastoral skills to assist its members in dealing with questions of these kinds, and in connecting such answers as may emerge to the Christian vocabulary of vocation.
- 028 Each individual brings to the discussion of secular vocation a rich and complex personal story. However, there are certain general patterns of response which Christian people in fact make, and the statement of these may provide useful guidelines for clarifying for each individual the meaning of vocation.
- 029 (i) A Christian reflects on a specific activity where he or she has found, or expects to find, the freedom to respond to need in society, which may also give a sense of personal fulfilment. In relation to this activity there is discovered, if only occasionally, an awareness of powers, gifts and potentialities within the personality crying out for development and coherent expression. The Christian feels an obligation to develop these gifts and powers to the full; and to find a context where the resultant skills can be practised so as to amplify the possibilities of witnessing to Jesus Christ and of serving the well-being of human society and the natural order.
- 030 From the perspective of faith, *these experiences constitute a vocation from God.*
- 031 It is important to affirm the enormous range of activities (incorporating paid work, voluntary service and family relationships) which can become for Christian people an authentic secular vocation.
- 032 Secular vocations for Christians vary in length; some Christians are given a secular vocation which is life-long; others find a short-term vocation, and when it is complete or ended by circumstances, they must be open to discerning a new vocation from God.
- 033 (ii) Sometimes, however, Christians feel keenly restrictions and constraints preventing significant choices in life. Personal capacities (e.g. physical strength, intellectual abilities, practical skills) are severely limited. Economic

necessities, or arbitrary circumstances of birth and upbringing, may drastically limit possibilities. Many Christians in such situations then accept as graciously as possible the limits of the contribution they can make to the well-being of society and the natural order; what tasks can be done are gladly performed to the glory of God. In such circumstances, however, the language of vocation is not normally appropriate; but the gospel leaves such Christians in no doubt of their worth as persons, nor of their general calling into a life of love and service (para. 014).

B.3. ECCLESIAL MINISTRIES¹

034 To build up the church

‘Let all things be done for edification’ (1 Cor 14:26) is a theme which underpins all the particular ministries in the church for which God chooses or sets apart individuals. Because the church is part of human history, it is exposed to the dangers of false teaching, the intrusion of worldly values and the ravages of sin (Gal 1:6-9; 1 John 2:18-25; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Matt 13:24-30). Individual Christians err and fail, and conflicts arise between Christian brothers and sisters. Christians therefore need to minister to one another (Matt 18:15-20); and the church as a whole, embodying the richness of the grace manifested in Christ (Eph 4:11-16), must guide, support and discipline its members (1 Cor 5:4; 1 Thess 5:19-22), and assess critically its continuing relationship to the gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-2; Gal 1:6-9). Only those who know their need of God’s grace and humbly receive ministry from their fellow Christians can be channels of God’s self-giving love (John 13:1-10).

035 All Christians are ministers

In the Pauline churches it was taken for granted that each individual Christian was given a specific ecclesial ministry. In 1 Cor 12 each Christian is said to receive a gift or gifts from the one Spirit, and these gifts constitute the varied functions within the body (also Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 16:1-4; Eph 4:7-16). Certainly the worship of the church was the corporate responsibility of all the participants (1 Cor 14, especially vs. 26). It is not clear whether this picture was taken for granted by all the NT authors and churches; but our conviction is that the church is most truly what God wants it to be when each Christian, with the help of the Christian community, discerns, develops and uses the Spirit’s gifts in ministry.

¹ We prefer ‘ecclesial’ to ‘ecclesiastical’ because the latter tends to carry with it a picture of the church as a settled, rather inward-looking and bureaucratic institution. An ‘ecclesial’ ministry, properly understood, is a fluid concept which refers to a wide range of imaginative forms of service which clarify and strengthen the Christian identity of the church as a human community and which furthers the church’s outreach into every facet of the world’s life.

036 Discerning vocation to ecclesial ministries

The matching of gifts to individuals with their tasks in and for the church is a subtle and sensitive procedure, involving discernment and testing. The following patterns have been evident in the church throughout its history:

the whole church, together with the individual concerned, recognises in a person the gifts needed for a particular piece of work or long-term task.

The church recognises in an individual the gifts and graces needed for a specific ministry; even though the individual concerned may be unaware of his or her potential in that area of service or reluctant to offer himself or herself for the work required, the church calls that individual to fulfil this ministry.

An individual is inspired by the Spirit to initiate a particular project or serve a need; the church fails at the time to discern the Spirit's work and only belatedly recognises and honours such a prophetic ministry.

The church has important needs which on the surface seem incapable of being met with the limited talents of its members; God through his Spirit gives the gifts through which the church may continue and grow in its mission.

037 Varied in length and nature

There is a rich diversity of words and phrases in the NT (30 in all) used to describe the tasks of individual Christians. Specific forms of church service were diverse in nature (1 Cor 12:5; Rom 12:6-8) and in length. For example:

the Seven were chosen to attend to the needs of the neglected widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3-5), so that their work was limited in scope.

Others were appointed to short-term tasks, such as those who gathered up the collection for the Jerusalem church (2 Cor 8:17-19).

Paul was set apart for the life-long task of preaching the gospel among the Gentiles (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15; Acts 9:15).

- 038 (a) There is nothing in the NT which implies that the importance of a specific ministerial task is related to *the time that must be devoted to it* for its proper fulfilment.
- 039 (b) The importance of particular ministries is not judged on whether or not *they merit income* for the ministers from the wider church community. In the NT period some ministers did receive payment; others did not (1 Cor 9:3-18; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17).
- 040 (c) It is also unwise to discriminate rigidly between ministries in terms of *the form of commissioning* used for any specific task. In the NT churches there was a wide range of acts of commissioning. These included: verbal commissioning (Mark 3:14; John 20:17, 21-23); negotiated agreements sealed with the right-hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9); election by show of hands (2 Cor 8:19); prayer and casting lots (Acts 1:23-26); and prayer and laying-on of hands (Acts 6:6), accompanied sometimes by fasting (Acts 13:2-3). In the last

mentioned category we can discern in the Pastoral Letters the beginnings of the custom which in the later church became the regular method of ordaining elders (1 Tim 4:14, 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). We must recall, however, that the NT is silent about the form of commissioning used in a wide range of varied ministries. And even some of the well-established forms carried subtle variations of meaning and significance in different contexts in the rapidly developing life of the churches in the first century. Imposition of hands, for example, expressed not only the idea of appointment, or ordination, to office in a congregation, but also, in different situations, the meanings of blessing (Mark 10:16), healing (Acts 9:17) or conveying the Spirit to new converts (Acts 8:17).

041 Leadership

Issues of *authority and leadership* were inevitably part of the church's experience from the beginning (1 Thess 5:12-13). Leadership is among the relatively small handful of ecclesial ministries given great prominence in the NT (Acts 1:15-26; Rom 10:14-17, 12:6-8, 15:16; 1 Cor 12:28-30; Eph 2:20, 4:11-13; Heb 13:7, 17). 'There can be no church community without a leader or team of leaders'.²

042 Leadership is given by the Spirit. Thus

(a) In the Christian view, attention is focused on the personal and spiritual qualities of those with a vocation to lead. Autocracy, authoritarianism, self-seeking and manipulation of other people are unacceptable. Servanthood, modelled on the ministry of Jesus, is basic (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17). Leadership is a *ministry*. In Paul's experience (2 Cor 4:1-12) leadership involved the capacity to enter deeply into another human being's weakness, hurt and confusion, and to speak creatively out of the leader's own vulnerability so that the other person found new life and courage.

043 (b) Leadership cannot be confined to those formally authorised as leaders. Leadership can arise spontaneously or from an unexpected quarter when a situation demands that an initiative be taken (1 Cor 6:5, 12:28, 16:15). Those formally authorised as leaders exercise their oversight by encouraging church members to contribute their gifts and, where appropriate, to take initiatives, and to enable and sustain the gifts of their partners in ministry. They also carry responsibility for the church remaining true to its nature and mission (2 Cor 11:28; Phil 1:9-11).

044 NT examples of leadership

(a) Paul the apostle

Paul's primary task as an apostle was to pioneer the life of Christ in new places (Rom 15:20-21). His particular vocation to preach to the Gentiles (Rom 15:16) was part of a larger task of proclaiming the gospel and creating Christian communities among Jews as well as Gentiles (Gal 2:9; Rom 11:13ff), and of drawing all into one in Christ (Gal 3:28).

² A paraphrase by Schillebeeckx of Jerome's dictum, *Ecclesia non est quae non habet sacerdotes* ('There is no church which does not have priests').

045 Paul's authority derived from: his sense of call from God through the risen Christ (2 Cor 4:1; Gal 1:12-16); his sharing in the common tradition of faith (1 Cor 15:1-11); the recognition given to his work by other accredited authorities (Gal 2:9); his founding of churches (1 Cor 9:2; 2 Cor 11:2); and the sincerity and integrity of his life (2 Cor 1:12, 4:2). He embodied the life and the dying of Christ (2 Cor 4:11; Gal 6:14, 17). So he could address the church: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1).

046 Paul did not work alone. His co-workers were indispensable assistants (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 8:6); he always relied upon material and prayerful support from existing congregations (Phil 4); he expected other ministries to overlap with and complement his own (1 Cor 1:14-17, 3:5-9).

Paul gave no thought to any successor to his apostolic work, because he assumed the end of all things was at hand (Rom. 13:11-12).

047 (b) Elder

The Greek word *presbuteros* is a fluid word which, in different contexts, can take one of a range of meanings. It can mean 'old', 'venerable' or 'elder/presbyter'. Thus in 1 Tim 5:1-2 older persons are referred to; in 1 Tim 5:17 'elder' is the most natural translation. Behind this flexibility of meaning lies an assumption taken for granted in the ancient world, that wisdom and leadership belonged naturally to the older members of society. Greater age elicited greater deference. Longevity thus becomes an aspiration because it merited respect, influence and authority (Ps. 91:16). In the Jewish synagogue the elders played their part as leaders because of their social standing in the wider community. At least by the end of the first century and possibly earlier, some Christian churches were organising local leadership on a similar pattern.³

048 Elders operated a team leadership (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5); and it may be that the 'Bishop' referred to in 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7 was head of the team of elders. Appointment was by laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). Although the institution of elders may have owed much to Jewish precedents, it was given a distinctively Christian colouring: elders must display high moral qualities (Tit 1:5-6; 1 Pet 5:1-11); leadership must be open to all, as God calls, and not just to the elderly (1 Tim 3:1, 4:12); their authority depends on their faithfulness in handing on the apostolic tradition of faith and teaching (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14, 2:2).

049 The trend of historical developments

Within the NT, churches began moving at different rates and along different routes from communities which expected an imminent end to history towards settled institutions preparing for a long-term future. When a single descriptive name is used for a particular ministry, we cannot assume that within the literature in the NT, still less in later Christian literature, the name carries a fixed meaning. The Greek word *diakonos*, for example, is variously translated in different contexts as 'minister', 'servant' and 'deacon'. In the second and

³ Church leaders are referred to as elders in the NT as follows: Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22, 16:4, 20:17, 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17-19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 2 John 1; 3 Jn 1.

third centuries there continued to be diverse patterns of leadership and varied theological understandings of leadership (including some whose origin lay outside the NT). Increasingly, however, a single pattern of ordained leadership emerged of bishops, presbyters and deacons. This represented the church's experience that those ministries which point to the true nature of the church and its mission were: leadership combined in various ways with the *ministries of the word, the sacraments and pastoral care*. The fact that these ministries were integral to the church's life did not negate the truth that in local situations there were always other important and needful ministries determined by local circumstances; or that in different periods a rich variety of groups and communities arose to witness to aspects of Christian faith in danger of being neglected.

050 **Methodist styles of leadership**

(a) One of the distinctive features of Methodism is its adoption of *collective forms of leadership*, most notably in the Conference (regularly called 'the supreme authority' in CPD), in the Circuit Meeting (S.O. 512) and in the Church Council, whose responsibilities are defined as follows: 'The general oversight of the Local Church shall be undertaken by the Church Council, exercising leadership over the whole field of the church's concern' (S.O. 616).

051 (b) *Individual forms of leadership* find their place and purpose within the representative decision-making groups. For example, S.O. 623 defines the general responsibilities of church stewards as follows: 'The church stewards are corporately responsible with the minister or probationer having pastoral charge of 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.'

052 (c) Significant and distinctive leadership is provided by *ordained ministers* who have 'a principal and directing part' within the great duties of being 'Stewards in the household of God and Shepherds of His flock' (CPD, pp.61-62).

053 (d) *The key to effective leadership* in the church is to see that the aims of the church (para. 013) are understood, agreed and owned by all members of the church; leadership of this kind gives to all members an equal responsibility in achieving the church's aims, and liberates them to take initiatives in pursuing these aims. It cannot be stressed too strongly that good *leadership releases, encourages and facilitates the putting to good use of the enormous variety of gifts among all God's people in the service of the church*.

054 (e) A neglected form of leadership is the *ministry of visitation*. In the biblical tradition the verb 'to visit' characteristically describes God's looking up individuals or the people with a concern for their welfare. His visitation was focused in Jesus (Luke 1:68, 1:78, 7:16, 9:1-10); it brought blessings to the weak and disadvantaged (Matt 25:36, 43; Jas 1:27), but judgement to the disobedient and blind (Luke 19:43-44). The ministry of visitation to churches is practised by a leader (or team of leaders) who visits a church from outside to

bring a fresh and critical perspective to its understanding of its life and work (Acts 11:22-24, 15:36).

055 John Wesley exercised such a ministry to the earliest Methodist societies. The ordained ministers carried on this tradition through the short-term itinerancy and the particular responsibility of the quarterly visitation of the classes (S.O. 525(1)). Visiting preachers made an informal contribution. However, contemporary Methodism does not have a widespread system of classes which meet; and expectations about length of appointments of ordained ministers have changed considerably in recent decades, as have the expectations about the relationship of an ordained minister to the locality where he or she resides and to churches in his or her pastoral charge.

056 **Ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care in the Methodist tradition**

The Ministry of the Word. This has many aspects. It includes:

witness and evangelism in secular contexts, by which men and women are called to faith;

the creation of new Christian communities and groups in situations where Christ is not known or honoured;

study and exposition of the scriptures;

preaching the gospel and teaching within the worship of the church;

parents in the home and teachers in Junior Church teaching children about God;

the work of theologians (an increasing number of whom are not ordained).

057 **The ministry of the sacraments.** Baptism and holy communion are corporate acts of celebration involving the whole congregation. Participation by a range of individuals in the preparation of these services (e.g. church and communion stewards, baptismal roll secretary) and in their conduct (reading from the Bible, preaching, leading intercessions, accompanying hymns, assisting in the distribution of bread and wine) enhances the corporate nature of the event. In Methodist practice and discipline it is normal for an ordained person to administer the sacrament of baptism and to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper; Conference makes arrangements for variation from this rule (MSB, p.A3, para.12; SO 011; 'Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper', *Agenda*, 1984, pp.24-7).

058 **The ministry of pastoral care.** Pastoral care involves Christians in God's continuing work of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling and enabling people to co-operate for the well-being of human communities and in the struggle for justice, freedom and peace. This ministry too takes many forms, and is strengthened by many and various contributions, formal and informal, from church members. One main purpose of pastoral care is to enable Christians to develop as ministers in the general sense, i.e. increasingly to dedicate their lives to the way of loving service. Necessarily, therefore, pastoral care includes the help given to Christian people to discern their

charismatic gifts and to discover their vocations, in the church and in the world.

059 **General observations** on the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care.

(a) *Each of these ministries is normally exercised in a variety of ways by a large number of Christians both in the world and in the church.*⁴ Preaching, for example, can happen informally when a Christian bears testimony to his or her faith; or it can happen more formally when an accredited local preacher or ordained minister delivers a sermon. Thus the exercise of these crucial ministries should be viewed as a collaborative activity.

060 (b) *Each of these forms of ministry needs its own leadership.* A leader of such a ministry carries great responsibilities. It is therefore vital for the well-being of the church that such a leader be clearly accountable to the church as a whole. This requires a rigorous discipline and proper authorisation for leaders in these ministries, but not necessarily for all who share in these ministries with the leader. Thus, in the circuit situation it is obviously right to give connexional recognition and commissioning to a local preacher after appropriate training and examination. It seems right also to continue the established custom in local churches of formally recognising and commissioning class leaders, pastoral visitors, and workers with children and young people. In general terms, however, we discourage formal commissioning in a liturgical setting of other specific ministries within the church. (For informal acknowledgement of ministries see para. 062).

061 (c) *Leadership* in the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care needs to be exercised in a manner which *encourages church members to share in them.* (See again note 4). The impression is sometimes given, both to those authorised to these ministries and also to members not so authorised, that the performance of these ministries, which are crucial to the church's identity and purpose, may be left to those formally recognised and commissioned. Then proclaiming God's word is *confined* to the local and ordained preachers, pastoral care to class leaders, and so forth. Gifts and insights of diverse and enriching kinds in the congregation lie unused; or church members lose confidence in the value of their informal contributions. By encouraging its members to share in these important ministries, the church broadens the ways in which they may be understood. Gifts of healing or teaching, for example, widen the church's experience of pastoral care and the ministry of the word respectively (paras. 056-058). The quiet, supportive and prayerful ministry which many church members give to those who carry specific responsibilities or who initiate new ministries is an invaluable contribution in itself; it is also a means of sharing in those tasks upon which the church's identity and purpose rest.

⁴ The exception to this might be the ministry of the sacraments. In the Deed of Union it is explicitly declared that no-one has an exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. Discussion of sacraments takes place at a different point in the Deed of Union, and no attempt is made to discuss whether or not ordained persons have an exclusive title to preside over the sacraments. Our practice and discipline are summarised in para. 057.

062 (d) We believe it would be valuable if churches could *recognise in informal ways* the many and various ministries which the church needs and needs to release. The Covenant Service is one appropriate context for this; in addition particular persons and specific ministries could be mentioned regularly in the prayers of the church.

063 The relation between leadership ministries and the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care

It is not *necessary* for those appointed to positions of leadership (e.g. church and circuit stewards, Divisional Secretaries⁵) also to exercise formal and accredited roles in the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care; though they may do so.

064 Ordained ministers may, in the first instance, be defined as those persons who are called by God to a ministry which combines a ministry of oversight (which may be exercised at circuit, district or connexional level) with formal leadership in the ministries of the word, sacraments and pastoral care.

065 The meaning of ordination

The office, or role, of the ordained minister focuses the calling of the church as a whole (see paras. 013, 043).

066 Those whom God calls to the ordained ministry cannot expect adequately to fulfil the role, either individually or collectively. However, to point as accurately as possible to the ideal, the church tests a vocation to ordained ministry at every level of its life, looking for appropriate gifts or the potential to develop appropriate gifts, and seeking also evidence of personal Christian maturity and openness. It trains accepted candidates and places them under discipline with respect to stationing, character, fidelity and competence (S.O.481 (iii)). In the Methodist Church, commitment to the ordained ministry has been understood to be life-long.

067 The 1974 report on *Ordination* summed up the theology of ordination as follows: 'As a perpetual reminder of (the calling of the people of God) and as a means of being obedient to it, the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church and through the Church to the world.' (para. 14).

068 The focus of the church's ministry: individual and corporate

The ordained ministry, like every other ecclesial ministry, must be set firmly within the church and its aims. Some account must therefore be given of the precise relationship between ordained ministry and the focal significance for

⁵ Thus the Conference of 1980 adopted the proposal of the President's Council (*Agenda* pp.8-9) that a lay person may be appointed as a General Secretary of a Division. No conditions were set forward in the report, nor in SO 302, regarding the experience or status of any candidate for such an appointment.

the church of non-ordained leadership in the ministries of the Word and of pastoral care⁶ and of all other ministries of leadership. Distinct emphases may be discerned in the Methodist tradition.

- 069 Some have seen *the ordained minister as an individual always leading and focusing the diverse leadership ministries in the church.*
- 070 Others have seen *the ordained ministry in partnership with all other leadership ministries together focusing in each context the calling of the whole church.*
- 071 We wish to underline our belief that the pluralist nature of the contemporary Methodist Church and the history of the Methodist tradition can be used creatively only when the church *enables to flourish both those who discern the church's calling in a focal person and those who perceive the church's calling in conciliar or collaborative models of leadership.*
- 072 Our conviction is that the ecclesial ministries of all God's people will be served if the church expresses these theological understandings in church structures which encourage those who espouse different understandings of leadership to learn from one another. We believe that this conviction coheres with para. 26 of the section on Ministry in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which expounds the thesis: 'The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way.'

073 Professionalism and the ordained ministry

In recent generations the professionalisation of the ordained ministry has increased in line with the professionalisation of much of society. The emergence of the professions has been a mixed blessing. The benefits to the ordained ministry have been demonstrated in a deeper concern for standards of training, levels of competence in the performance of tasks, and accountability of ordained ministers to one another. These gains have derived from an understanding of professionalism which stresses that skills and knowledge are developed among professionals with a view to the professionals working with other people and enabling others to take a responsible share in appropriate tasks. However, there are familiar difficulties which arise in all professions from the fact that members of a profession do acquire a body of knowledge and experience which is quantitatively and often qualitatively greater than that which is available to the non-professionals. Thus: the gap between the training and competence of the professional and the relatively undeveloped gifts and skills of those who are not professionals is so large that co-operation becomes difficult if not impossible; professional groups are constantly tempted to believe that they are the sole guardians of expertise and insight in their area of competence; professions can therefore become defensive, self-perpetuating, oppressive and indifferent to the needs and wisdom of those they are intending to serve; and conversely, non-professionals easily become unduly dependent upon professional expertise and lose confidence in their own gifts and skills.

⁶ See note 4 and para. 059.

- 074 The benefits and the difficulties of the professionalisation of the ordained ministry are evident within Methodism. We believe the difficulties can best be helped both by wider and more critical discernment of these difficulties throughout the church, and by development of professional practice among ordained ministers with a clearer focus upon its purpose in the life of the church and the world. Issues to be faced in the pursuit of collaborative styles of leadership include the following:
- 075 (a) **New styles of leadership.** The highly professionalised style of leadership in the (predominantly male) ordained ministry should not provide the only model of leadership.⁷ Alternative styles of leadership must be enabled to flourish. We mention particularly the insights pressed upon us by women, ethnic minority groups and social classes other than the predominant male middle class.
- 076 (b) **Using conflict creatively.** In a highly institutionalised community like Methodism with established professional leadership in the ordained ministry, it is difficult for leaders also to be self-critical, and thereby to fulfil a prophetic ministry.
- 077 Leaders in secular communities have frequently recognised the value of the person without status who brings a profoundly critical perspective to the prevailing values and concerns of those in authority; hence the jester in the king's court, the clown in the circus, or the role of the investigative journalist in modern society. Ordained ministers in particular need structures where they can listen attentively to others, especially the young, as well as to experience and styles of leadership outside their normal world-view.
- 078 (c) **Liberating ordained ministers from destructive levels of stress.** Ordained ministers do not carry responsibility for the church. Ultimately God himself carries responsibility for the church. That responsibility he graciously shares with all his people. Leadership in the church, itself a collaborative ministry of ordained and non-ordained, operates well when it is set within this context and is therefore able to operate within reasonable boundaries (para. 053). Ordained ministers have much to learn from many church members who have to cope with inordinate levels of stress in contemporary society.
- 079 Ordained persons have many other duties and interests besides those which are strictly to do with their ministry: they may be married, have hobbies, political commitments, etc. So long as these aspects of life are given no theological meaning, they are perceived as intrusions into a life intended to be devoted without any distraction to ordained ministry, and may provoke unnecessary guilt or resentment. Alternatively, ordained ministers may be tempted to insist that non-ecclesiastical dimensions of their lives are aspects of their ordained ministry. A strong and distinct sense of ecclesial vocation which is indispensable for ordained ministry must not deny opportunity for leisure and domestic and civic life. Nor must the call to the ordained ministry be thought necessarily to exclude the experience of personal fulfilment and renewal in these 'non-ministerial', secular aspects of life.

⁷ On the contribution of women to the ministry, see para. 009.

080 (d) **All Christians represent Christ.** The church flourishes when all its members, ordained and non-ordained, affirm one another as representatives to the world of Christ and the church and as signs of the presence and ministry of Christ in the church. When the strong in the church (who usually include the ordained ministers) defer to and encourage the weak, and when the weak bear their testimony to the strong, the collaborative ministry of the whole church is enriched.

SECTION C: MINISTRY & CHURCH STRUCTURES

C.1 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

081 The basic structures which have served Methodism throughout most of its history, focused in the local church and the circuit, will continue into the foreseeable future (SO 600). These structures can be used imaginatively to nurture the ministry of all God's people. At appropriate levels of the church's life, significant adaptations of Methodist Church structures and disciplines may be necessary.

082 Church structures can frustrate or encourage individual Christian discipleship. Supportive structures are those which cohere with the insights about ministry, vocation and leadership which are widely subscribed to in the church. Section B attempts to summarise these insights.

083 There is no simple way of deducing appropriate church structures from a limited statement about the church and Christian ministry. In practice structures evolve from what may be learned from the Bible, Christian history and current developments and pressures both in the churches and in non-ecclesiastical institutions. In what follows we set forward outlines of what we believe to be the next important stages in the development of Methodist Church structures. We are not offering rigid blueprints to be imposed on the church, but guidelines within which appropriate groups may be able to envisage possibilities for themselves. In the not too distant future we expect that the Conference will receive further recommendations, for which these current proposals will be seen as having prepared the way.

C.2 A METHODIST ORDER FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY⁸

084 In the Methodist tradition there are two primary levels of the church's life where individual members are encouraged to discern and practise their ecclesial ministries: the local church and circuit; and the connexion. Prominent examples at the local level are the ministries of the ordained and of local preachers. At connexional level significant contributions are made by ordained ministers and church members in Conference and connexional committees. Our structures provide fewer opportunities for Methodist members to make their gifts and time available for the church's mission and

⁸ These proposals have been formulated in the light of discussions of the report 'The Diaconate and other authorised Lay Ministries' (1983), which was referred back to the Division of Ministries.

ministry at district level.⁹ A district strategy for mission will be served by the creation of a new order, the outlines of which are now to be sketched.

085 We envisage an order¹⁰ open to members of the Methodist Church consisting of the following:

(a) **Church members in the paid service of the church employed** whole-time or part-time in evangelistic or pastoral work according to the provisions of SO 581 (1)-(10) shall be members of the order.

(b) **Voluntary unpaid workers.** Church members who wish to serve the church on a voluntary basis, part-time or whole-time, in ways which cannot appropriately be done under existing offices in the church, may apply to be members of the order.

(c) **Deaconesses** who wish to take appointments within the church will do so by being also members of MOMM. (See also para. 087). MOMM will thus receive the contribution that can be provided by the Wesley Deaconess Order from its rich experience of belonging together and hence of living under a discipline which operates at a level wider than that of the local church and circuit.

086 The order will operate as follows:

(a) **Aim.** The aim of the order will be to bring cohesion and structure to the ministry and mission of the church in each district, in accordance with the policy for mission approved by the district synod. The order will thus bring together church members who will be committed to one another as well as to the service of Christ in society and in the church. Members of the order will perform a wide range of tasks, including pioneering Christian presence in non-ecclesiastical institutions, evangelism, pastoral care, administration and specialised forms of community service; but because they are not ordained ministers, they will not be in full pastoral charge of churches.

(b) **Eligibility.** The order will be flexible enough to welcome and use a variety of commitments to the order itself. The minimum commitment will require a member of the order to remain in membership for as long as he or she is performing a task approved by the district synod. Some, however, will wish to join the order with a life-long commitment; others will wish to put themselves at the disposal of the order to be deployed according to strategic needs, whether for a limited period or on an open 'contract'.

(c) **Entry.** The testing of vocation and of the capacity of a candidate to use and develop appropriate gifts will be the responsibility of the district, working collaboratively with the circuit in which a candidate has his or her membership. Entry into the order will be authorised by the Conference after a

⁹ If the present district structure of Methodism should be reviewed, it would be appropriate to devise strategies for mission, including the administration of a Methodist order, over a region determined by geographical factors and by central and local government units of administration.

¹⁰ In the history of the church the word 'order' has often implied lifelong commitment (e.g. para. 020); but this is not necessarily the case. We envisage an order in which some may offer a life-long commitment, but most will not.

suitable period of testing and preparation, and confirmed by a service of recognition and commissioning.

(d) **Discipline.** The order will be under the authority of the Conference, which will serve the order through a divisional committee drawn jointly from the Home Mission Division and the Division of Ministries, but which reports to Conference through the Board of the Division of Ministries. The divisional committee will recommend candidates to the Conference for entry into the order; recommendation will be based upon the examination of the candidate at district level. The order will be encouraged to create its own governing Council which will set ideals and standards for all its members, will regulate its own affairs and, particularly at its formation, foster the connexional and distinctive identity of the order (e.g. an appropriate name and symbol). Much of the administration of the order, and the oversight of its members, will devolve upon district authorities. Some responsibilities will have to be borne by the staff of the Division of Ministries, and it is envisaged that this will be achieved by some reorganisation of portfolios within that Division.

(e) **Training and development.** Members of the order will be required successfully to undertake training of a style and character appropriate to the work they will do. The Conference, through its divisional committee, will approve standards of training. Members of the order must be willing to develop and commit themselves to a common spiritual discipline of a flexible kind; and to meet with fellow-members of the order within the district at an agreed frequency, for mutual support and encouragement.

(f) **Transferability.** Arrangements will be made for membership of the order to be transferable from one district to another.

087 **Some consequences** of the creation of a Methodist Order for Mission and Ministry:

(a) **Deaconesses.** If Conference were to judge it right to direct the WDO to begin again to recruit to its membership those who intended to offer lifetime service, we would regard this as not inconsistent with the proposals of this report. We would, however, add a proviso that membership should be open to both men and women and the arrangements be subject to review when the other suggestions in this Report have been developed and experience of them has been assessed.

088 (b) The Order after Stephen in Service (OASIS) and other similar groups will also be able to maintain their traditions and identity under the auspices of MOMM.

089 (c) Until some clearer light, perhaps resulting from an ecumenical consensus, is available, the use of the term deaconess/deacon should not be extended beyond the WDO; though the ministries exercised by members of MOMM link with what has traditionally been diaconal ministry.

090 (d) The requirement of SO 581 (3 (III)) that all those who are appointed under it in whole-time work should have contracts of employment must be strictly observed. This arrangement, together with those arrangements which apply to members of the WDO, will be adequate for the immediate future. Further

developments would need to be carefully considered by the relevant authority in relation to contractual questions.

- 091 (e) Standing Orders make provision for a local church to employ a whole-time youth leader (SO 650 (5)); for a circuit to employ a whole-time youth leader (SO 581 (11)); and for a district to employ a whole-time youth officer (SO 462). Greater flexibility needs to be introduced into the existing SO's to make possible, among other things, part-time paid appointments of youth and community workers.
- 092 (f) It is hoped that appointments of paid youth workers will in future take place in close consultation with the district committee responsible for the district strategy for mission. There cannot be a simple absorption of youth workers (nor of other specialist workers employed by local churches whose appointments are not covered by SO 581) into the proposed order, primarily because there is no requirement for a paid youth worker to be a member of the Methodist Church. It is hoped, however, that church members who are employed by the church will want to become members of the order.
- 093 (g) The title of SO 581 (currently 'Lay Ministry') should be changed, perhaps to become 'Church members in the paid service of the church'. If our proposals for MOMM are accepted by the Conference and suitable SO's are framed, they should incorporate all SO's concerning members in paid employment in church work in a renamed Part 7 of CPD.

C.3 TEAM LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL CHURCH, CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT

- 094 Section B outlined the central place that collaborative understandings of leadership play in our theological reflection upon the church. In summary, the advantages of team leadership, involving church members as well as ordained ministers, are these:
- i) a team leadership more fully represents the diverse insights and concerns of the Christian community;
 - ii) team leadership facilitates a sharing of responsibility, pastoral support, reflection and action;
 - iii) team leadership opens up the consultative and decision-making process to professional skills available among church members and to the insights and aspirations of church members whose experience is complementary to the world-view of ordained ministers.
- 095 The purpose of team leadership, set within a collaborative view of the ministry of the whole church, is: to draw out and use well the ministerial gifts of church members and ordained ministers, and, as a by-product, to liberate ordained leaders to enjoy a more relaxed and coherent understanding of their role and of the limits of their responsibility.
- 096 In what follows we have drawn upon the insights of the report on *Team Ministries* (*Agenda*, 1967, pp.540-548) and the accumulated experience of the

Team Ministry Committee (now called the Committee for Collaborative Ministries).

097 Issues to be faced in setting up team leadership

There is a need to evolve *well-defined, flexible and self-critical leadership teams at every level of the church's life*. We recognise that models of team leadership cannot be imposed on churches, circuits and districts; many ordained ministers will feel temperamentally ill-equipped for participating in teams, or will be anxious about the significant changes of authority and methods of working which involvement in teams inevitably brings. Some of the structural and practical issues which need to be faced are the following.

- 098 (a) Circuits have become increasingly sectionalised. At this point our practice and our constitution differ. CPD includes the concept of an ordained minister having pastoral charge of a local church, but there is no constitutional place for a 'section'. However, a section is a highly significant feature of an ordained minister's self-consciousness. While appointments are technically to circuits, in practice appointments are defined in terms of a section, where it is usually assumed the ordained minister will be the person in whom alone leadership is focused. The circuit often becomes the backcloth, an administrative convenience, or even an irrelevant encumbrance drawing people's attention from their true interests, rather than the natural unit of belonging and mission – for both ordained ministers and local churches. So deeply ingrained has become the identification between an individual ordained minister and a section that considerable effort is put into estimating equivalent work loads among the different sections of a circuit. On occasions this leads to irrational deployment of an ordained minister's pastoral responsibilities – as when, to balance the number of members in each section, churches which have no geographical relationship with each other are lumped together in a section.
- 099 The alternative picture which team leadership of circuits presents is this: Methodist members have the right of fairly ready access to dependable and skilled pastoral care; they need to know to whom they may turn for help, and when and where. However, there is no necessary reason why the person appointed to lead the ministry of pastoral care in a local church should also be the one who will carry the whole range of leadership functions for that church¹¹. Rather, the circuit leadership team, incorporating all the ordained ministers appointed to the circuit, carries that wider responsibility corporately. In practice this means that a circuit, having guaranteed pastoral care for its members, will be able to assist ordained ministers to find a balance between the following: concentrated effort in a limited area of work (which will in turn be shaped by an individual's aptitude, skills and experience); and the effectiveness of the team.
- 100 (b) The ecumenical movement has encouraged close working relationships between Methodist ministers and ordained ministers of other denominations. The benefits of this co-operation have been incalculable. *Many Methodist ministers will think it much more natural and creative to enter into ecumenical leadership teams in a locality than to expend considerable effort in generating*

¹¹ See further, para. 108 and note 14.

team leadership in a Methodist circuit at the expense of local ecumenical co-operation.

101 Close collegueship between ordained ministers of different denominations has highlighted a further complexity in the self-understanding of Methodist ministers. The latter have sometimes adopted patterns of relationship with congregations and with their colleagues which have, perhaps unconsciously imitated those characteristic of other denominations. By and large, the denominations with which closest co-operation has evolved have developed more individualistic perceptions of ordained ministry than were traditional within Methodism. In extreme cases this has led a Methodist minister, given responsibility for a considerable number of churches in a section, to attempt to repeat many times over the relationship between an ordained minister and a single congregation which has been prevalent in Anglican and Reformed traditions.

102 (c) The development of modes of behaviour and of self-understanding characteristic of the professions has been muted but evident among Methodist ministers. Team leadership calls for more thorough-going professional practice among ordained ministers in a way which incorporates critical reflection upon professionalisation in contemporary society. (See paras. 073-074).

103 Basic elements in leadership teams

It is expected that at different levels of the church's life, and in different locations, a large variety of team leadership structures will emerge and evolve. The unity of leadership patterns will be provided by there being common basic elements in most situations. By way of illustration there now follows an outline of some of these fundamental constituents in relation to circuits. It is hoped that *churches, ecumenical groupings and districts as well as circuits may envisage possibilities* appropriate to their own situations and aims.

104 (a) Leadership teams will normally comprise ordained and non-ordained ministers. The terms upon which they meet, share responsibility, make decisions and evaluate their work need to be negotiated and stated explicitly.¹²

105 (b) The appointment of ordained ministers to circuit leadership teams will need amendment, to include:

- i) A significant additional factor in judging the appropriateness of the appointment of an ordained minister to a circuit will be the ability of the prospective new team member and the remaining team members to work together in the service of the circuit as a whole, and to renegotiate the terms on which they exercise their joint responsibilities.
- ii) Circuit Stewards will be *ex officio* members of the circuit leadership team, and in this setting will exercise their role in regard to the invitation of ordained ministers.

¹² Such agreed terms would supplement SO 522 (1).

- iii) It will be less exceptional for superintendents to be appointed by the Conference upon nomination by the Circuit Meeting from among the ordained ministers already serving in the circuit. This procedure, already available within our usage, may in some instances be developed to facilitate a ‘circulating’ pattern among ordained ministers in a circuit for the important office of superintendent, always provided that any candidate for the superintendency has appropriate gifts and experience.
- 106 (c) The purpose of the circuit leadership team is to enable the Circuit Meeting to fulfil its responsibilities as set out in SO 512. To this end, a statement of purpose, closely imitating the mood of SO 623, will be a valuable asset for leadership teams. Particular functions for the circuit leadership team (under the Circuit Meeting) will be:
- to provide support, resources and training for local churches and particularly for local church leaders;
 - to provide resources for and stimulate awareness of and contributions to the mission of the church at circuit level;
 - to exercise a ministry of visitation to the local churches (para. 054),¹³ or to ensure that visitations take place.
- 107 (d) Team leadership, by its very existence, is a structural encouragement to churches to discover the advantages of collaborative ministry in the church as a whole – releasing gifts among church members, sharing skills, encouraging imaginative tasks, providing support through inter-dependence, deploying gifts and skills flexibly. It is the task of the local Church Council to identify for the local church its most important ministries at any point in time and to consult with the circuit leadership team how appropriate resources might be found in the local church itself, in neighbouring churches or in the circuit leadership team.
- 108 In each local church there must be exercised the ministries of word, sacrament and pastoral care (paras. 056-058). In particular the church needs accreditation and appropriate training for persons with an ecclesial vocation to lead the ministry of pastoral care in local churches, to work alongside ordained ministers.¹⁴

C.4 DEVELOPMENTS IN ORDAINED MINISTRY

¹³ SO 525 (1) will need modest amendment to clarify this function. The Division of Ministries will need to co-ordinate and assess developments in the ministry of visitation at several levels of the church’s life.

¹⁴ The Division of Ministries could be made responsible for the oversight of approved training for leadership in the ministry of pastoral care in a way analogous to that for Local Preachers. Encouragement of non-ordained leadership in this ministry (which might normally, though not exclusively, be exercised under the discipline of the Methodist Order for Mission and Ministry) will assist the flexible deployment of ordained ministers working in circuit leadership teams.

- 109 Among ordained ministers there is a wide diversity of understanding of the nature and functions of their ministry. In recent decades ordained ministers, attempting faithfully and imaginatively to respond to their calling and to the complexities of contemporary society, have pressed for more flexible patterns of deployment for the ordained ministry. In reviewing these processes, sufficient basic common understandings and adequate minimum, flexible structures must be provided to ensure the sense of Methodist ordained ministers belonging to one ministry (para. 024).
- 110 Appropriate structures need to be developed to enable the diverse components of the ordained ministry to enrich one another, to foster mutual awareness, support and identity. These ‘appropriate structures’ include a thorough review of the timing and declared aims of the circuit staff meeting and the ministerial sessions of District Synods and of Conference.
- 111 Structures cannot guarantee to create a sense of mutual belonging among ordained ministers. Personal qualities of trust, understanding, respect and co-operation are called for. Ordained ministers have not always found this easy, especially when perceptions about priorities have differed sharply.

112 Varied forms of ordained ministry

Ordained ministry is an *ecclesial ministry* (see B.3, note 1). One way of understanding the diversity of forms of ordained ministry is to identify the *primary focus* of the ecclesial ministry exercised by an individual ordained minister. For example,

- (a) The itinerant circuit minister works primarily within, for and from the churches in a circuit.
 - (b) Some ordained ministers are called to work primarily at District or Connexional level, in a variety of ways (e.g., President and Secretary of Conference, Divisional Secretaries, College Tutors, District Chairmen).
 - (c) A few ordained ministers are seconded to other denominations or ecumenical agencies in ministries whose primary focus is comparable with the range of possibilities covered by (a) and (b).
 - (d) A considerable number of ministers pursue their ministry primarily in a secular context, either in a particular institution or in a sector of contemporary secular life. (See further, C.4.1 below).
- 113 Within these broad categories there are many variations, e.g. a minister who works part time in a circuit and part time in a connexional job. We wish to develop further the diversity of ways in which ordained ministry may be exercised by commending local ordained ministry (see C.4.2 below).¹⁵

114 Appointment, Station and Residence

¹⁵ Throughout this report we use the shorthand descriptions Local Ordained Minister (LOM) and Sector Ordained Minister (SOM) to mean respectively ‘ordained minister in a local appointment’ and ‘ordained minister in a sector appointment’; Itinerant Ordained Minister (IOM) means an ordained minister in a circuit, district or connexional appointment. (See para. 149).

Traditionally ‘appointment’ and ‘station’ were interchangeable terms for Methodist ordained ministers, and both were linked with residence. This remains the case for most circuit appointments. However, to cope with the increasing diversity of forms of the one ordained ministry, it may be helpful to distinguish appointment and station as follows.

- 115 An ordained minister’s *appointment* identifies the primary location of his or her ecclesial ordained ministry; the *station* indicates the context in which an individual ordained minister may find structured pastoral support within the church, and accountability to the church at large for his or her ministry.
- 116 In the case of ordained ministers with district or connexional appointments, appointment and station remain interchangeable terms, but are separated from residence. In the case of ministers in other appointments, appointment and station are clearly distinguished. Similarly ordained ministers without appointment nevertheless have a station linked to residence.

117 **Ministry in other appointments**

This category presently includes all ordained ministers, who, with the permission of the church or at the behest of the church, work whole-time in an institution or context outside the gift of the Methodist Church. This category replaced ‘Sector Ministry’, which itself, in 1969, had replaced ‘Permission to serve external organisations’. The present category is probably too broad and imprecise. We recommend that the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments continue to be responsible for ministers without appointment and for two further categories of ordained ministers; who should be clearly distinguished: Sector Ordained Ministers; and Ordained Ministers serving other denominations or ecumenical agencies. Those in the latter category shall continue to be subject to the SO’s in Section 74 of CPD; details of their appointments shall be given in a separate list in the *Minutes of Conference*.

- 118 The phrase ‘Ministers in other appointments’ should be dropped because it is too wide in scope and because it has about it a negative ring which disguises the distinctive contribution from the people concerned to the ordained ministry and to the ministry of the whole people of God.

C4.1 Sector Ordained Ministry (SOM)

- 119 SOMs work whole-time in secular institutions, voluntary agencies or sectors of contemporary secular life where they *perceive their secular vocation as the locus of their ecclesial ordained ministry*. They may therefore work alongside men and women who own no allegiance to any Christian church. There they share in and sometimes spearhead the exploration of Christian life and Christian concerns for justice, freedom and peace.
- 120 SOMs also work *alongside Christian people of all denominations*, learning from them, enabling and stimulating them to discern the shape and form of individual and corporate Christian presence and witness in their common place of work. The ordained minister, by reason of his or her being known as an ordained person, acts as one who facilitates mutual support and encouragement among Christians in that institution or sector; and shares this task with some Christians who are not ordained. Denominational barriers are frequently

transcended. Thus a Methodist ordained minister appointed to work in a secular setting is a sign to the whole church of the urgent need to work towards the mutual acceptance of ordained ministries across denominational boundaries.

121 **SOM and Church-based Ministry.** Ordained ministers appointed to serve outside the confines of the church share a single ministry with ordained ministers in circuit appointments. All ordained ministers, at the Spring Synod, are required to participate in a service of re-dedication which incorporates the Resolutions on Pastoral Work (CPD, p.418). Resolution 6 reads: 'We resolve afresh to seek every opportunity to minister in Christ's name to those who work in industry, local government, and other sectors of the life of community' (CPD, p.573). By and large circuit ministers fulfil this obligation by pastoral conversation in domestic and local church settings with church members involved in various sectors; and by chaplaincies to local industry, etc. Ordained ministers in secular appointments exercise fundamentally the same ministry from *within* one of the distinct sectors of modern life. Ordained ministers in circuit and sector appointments complement one another so that co-operatively they may see themselves as seeking 'every opportunity' for such ministry.

122 **Transfer.** The present SO's (Section 74) address the situation where an ordained minister takes the initiative in applying for a non-Methodist appointment. Because such appointments are integral to the mission of the church and potentially supportive of church members exercising their secular vocations in various sectors of life, the Advisory Committee should continue to invite or urge appropriately qualified ordained ministers to apply for appointments in non-Methodist and secular institutions and contexts. This task should be performed with a sensitivity to the issue of widespread unemployment. In particular SO 743 (5) needs rephrasing to suggest that in any given year, or over a given period of years, the Stationing Committee will recommend a balance in the deployment of ordained ministers to meet the competing needs of ordained ministry in the circuits and in non-Methodist appointments. Such a policy of 'affirmative action' with respect to ordained ministry in the sectors would lead also to the revision of SO 745, to remove any suggestion that an ordained minister might not as easily be transferred from a non-Methodist appointment to a Methodist appointment as *vice versa*.¹⁶

123 **Accountability and Support**

(a) In each appointment an SOM is responsible to his or her employer and colleagues in the usual way for the proper performance of his or her duties.

124 (b) Each SOM needs also a station. This needs special attention: it is necessary to establish a clear link between work in a sector and the church as a whole so that the ministry of an SOM may be seen and affirmed by everyone as *ecclesial* ministry. In practice SOMs have not always found a circuit station satisfactory. We recommend that in future SOMs be given the choice between

¹⁶ The title of SO 745 is 'Return'. A more appropriate title might be 'Transfer to Methodist Church appointment'.

a *circuit station* (as at present) or a *station on a district list*. The reasons behind this latter recommendation are:

Some SOMs exercise their ministry over an area much wider than the circuit in which they reside; they would find value in consulting other ordained ministers and church members who have wide-ranging ministries.

Often only one SOM resides in a circuit; a district, however, can provide sufficient SOMs to create a supportive group with common or overlapping experiences and concerns.

- 125 In the case of a circuit station for an SOM, there must be a clear understanding between the SOM and the circuit staff that appropriate structures for mutual support and accountability will be constructed.
- 126 SOMs on a district list of stations will be listed as follows: 'AB, who resides in the —— Circuit (brief indication of the sector of work)'. The Chairman of the District will be responsible, with the SOMs concerned, for constructing appropriate structures of support and accountability.
- 127 In both cases care should be taken to incorporate both appropriate church members and ordained ministers in circuit work into the supportive structures; and we suggest that consideration be given to the establishment of a representative group of District Chairmen and SOMs to draw up guidelines, the group to be convened by the Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments.

C4.2 Local Ordained Ministry (LOM)

- 128 The concept of a local (that is, a non-stipendiary and a non-itinerant) ordained ministry has been discussed by the Conference on a number of occasions, most notably in 1977 and 1978. The *formal definition* provided in the 1978 report was:

Ministers in local appointments, like all ministers, believe themselves called of God to the ordained ministry. This call the Church tests and recognizes. They are trained for that ministry so that they are competent to exercise it. Like all ordinands, upon the recommendation of their District Synod they are received into Full Connexion by the Conference and ordained. They are leaders of worship, preachers of the Gospel, pastors within and outside the life of the Church, enablers and administrators. They are accountable to the Conference, and stationed in circuits by its authority. Their conditions of service and their relationship to the Conference are different from those of stipendiary ministers in that they are not entitled to a manse, stipend or pension, but only to agreed expenses incurred in the course of their circuit duties, and they are not subject to itinerancy.

129 It is unclear to what degree, if any, the Conference can be said to have accepted this concept in principle.¹⁷ Conference is invited to look freshly at the concept in the light of Section B of this report. The discussion of ministry, vocation and leadership in Section B provides a framework of thought which makes possible the notion of a local ordained ministry, alongside and working co-operatively with the stipendiary, itinerant ordained ministry.

130 **The arguments in favour** of a local ordained ministry are two-fold.

(a) What section B permits in our conception of ordained ministry:

Paras 038, 039 imply that ordained ministry is not essentially whole-time or stipendiary.¹⁸

131 Para 079 refers to the balance of ecclesial and secular vocations in the total discipleship of a stipendiary, itinerant ordained minister. That theme may be developed by noting that the relative weight given to ecclesial and secular vocations varies from ordained person to ordained person, and from one phase of life to another in each ordained person – as is also the case in respect of all church members. We therefore naturally conclude that there will be some who, throughout their ordained ministry or for a portion of their ordained ministry, will experience a call to work in paid, full-time (or part-time) secular employment and exercise their ecclesial ministry as ordained persons on a non-stipendiary and part-time basis in a circuit.¹⁹ Thus the difference between a local ordained minister and a circuit minister of the traditional type is not a difference in kind, but a difference of *balance* in the outworking of their faith and obedience *between ecclesial and secular vocations*.

132 (b) Emphases in Section B which can be given clear institutional expression through local ordained ministry.

Two emphases are noteworthy here: the stress on collaborative styles of ministry; and the encouragement to all Christians to discern their secular vocation as a significant focus of their discipleship.

133 i) Traditionally the Methodist minister in rural and many urban areas was available to any particular church in his circuit or section only for limited periods on specific days. Frequently he acted almost as a chaplain, who visited some of the churches from time to time and worked intensively in the period available in areas of ministry considered to be of greatest importance, leaving to local leaders the effective oversight of the churches between his

¹⁷ The Representative Session of the 1977 Conference adopted Notice of Motion 15 (*Daily Record*, p.47) which included the clause ‘Conference . . . adopts the general principle of “auxiliary ministry”.’ Previously the Ministerial Session had declined to adopt the report presented by the Division of Ministries on Auxiliary Ministries, while the Representative Session had adopted it by a narrow majority. The 1978 Report, ‘Ministers in Local Appointments’ was not adopted by the Conference.

¹⁸ These points have already been accepted by the Conference in adopting the 1960 and 1974 reports on Ordination. (*Ordination in the Methodist Church* (1960), p.8; *Ordination* (1974), para. 25).

¹⁹ In occasional circumstances some stipend appropriate to part-time work might be paid in addition to expenses.

visits. During the twentieth century, the rapid improvement in communications and in ease of travel have dramatically affected the relationships between ordained ministers and congregations in all social settings. Sometimes this has led to undue dependence upon and unrealistic expectations of ordained ministers, and to excessive stress in the life-style of ordained persons. A local ordained minister will be available only within restricted periods of time for the duties of ordained ministry. This fact will help church members and ordained ministers to discern the importance of working together and sharing responsibility for the church's well-being. It is not envisaged that a circuit will be staffed wholly by local ordained ministers, so there is no danger of normal expectations about pastoral support in emergencies being undermined. However, a local church, assessing in consultation with the circuit its resources of ministry and its needs and priorities, will have to ask: How can we best use this local ordained minister?

134 ii) A local ordained ministry will also enrich the ministry of the whole people of God by the ordained minister displaying in his or her own life serious Christian obedience in a secular and an ecclesiastical setting. This will facilitate church members identifying more readily with their ordained minister, and in turn will help ordained ministers to empathise more deeply with the needs and diverse claims upon time and energy experienced by Christian people endeavouring to live their lives well in both church and society.

135 **LOM builds upon the experience of some circuits.**

In practice the advent of a local ordained ministry will not cause undue disruption in the ministry of leadership offered to circuits and churches. There is already in Methodism experience of ordained ministers being available to churches only part-time, within restricted periods of time. We instance: supernumerary ministers doing part-time work in circuits; some part-time circuit appointments (the other part of the ordained minister's time being devoted to, say, a connexional job); and the limited voluntary ecclesial ministry sometimes offered by Ministers without appointment and by Ministers in other appointments.

136 **Earlier unease about LOM.** When the issue of a local ordained ministry has been discussed previously by the Conference, many have expressed unease at any deviation from the notion of an ordained minister being available whole time for his or her work. We suspect the springs of this unease are fourfold: the importance of whole-timeness as a sign of profound commitment to Christ; the unity of the ordained ministry; the effects on congregation and ordained minister of a near-permanent relationship; and the future of itinerancy. Our comments on these themes are the following.

137 (i) It is true that part of the witness of ordained ministers is to be a sign to the church of the depth and of the unconditional character of commitment to Christ that baptism lays upon every Christian. That testimony is shared with many others in the church who are not ordained. However, the quality of such witness in an ordained person is expressed in a life lived 'in every part' in Christ-like love and service, and is not confined to an ordained person's ecclesial ministry. It therefore becomes of less significance whether an ordained ministry is whole-time or part-time in the service of the church.

138 (ii) Ordained ministry in the Methodist Church has already experience of diverse structures (varied forms of initial training; Ministers in other appointments; Ministers without appointment). The advent of a local ordained ministry need not threaten the unity of the ordained ministry. Until Methodism has experience of incorporating local ordained ministers into its polity, we suggest that it is essential that the conditions and process of candidature for local ordained ministry shall be identical to those for itinerant ordained ministry; and that the initial training for local ordained ministry shall take place within one of the patterns recognised for the training of itinerant ordained ministry. This will ensure interchangeability between local and itinerant ordained ministries, a flexibility which will be to the advantage of the church and of ordained ministers themselves. Such interchangeability emphasises what is in any case true, that the validity of the ordination of a local ordained minister is not confined to a limited geographical area; a local ordained minister shares with all other ordained persons ordination into the Church of God.

139 From the point of view of the ordained minister, his or her sense of participating in the one body of ordained ministers will be enhanced by a developing self-understanding as a professional person. An ordained minister's identity, confidence and competence can be secured through appropriate training, probation and acceptance within the discipline and ethos of the corporate body of ordained ministers. Continued recognition and 'status' are compatible, as in other professions, with time off from the practice of the profession and with part-time or unpaid, voluntary practice of the profession.

140 (iii) Many congregations will fear that if they are served by a local ordained minister who is not subject to stationing, problems may arise: if relationships between ordained minister and a congregation become difficult, or if an ordained minister becomes so settled in a church that he or she loses the capacity to challenge a congregation to new understandings of the gospel or new ways of exercising its ministry, how can the relationship be significantly changed or concluded? A number of factors may help in such situations:

no congregation or local ordained minister will exist in isolation from other churches or other ordained ministers in the circuit, and this wider context may help towards reconciliation, mutual understanding, or redeployment of pastoral oversight;

we believe that a job description for a local ordained minister will provide a useful contribution to agreed expectations and responsibilities for both the local ordained minister and for the church; the job description may include an initial term of service prior to a thorough review of the working arrangements;

an increasing confidence in a ministry of visitation, a periodic critical evaluation of the relationship between a church and a local ordained minister, and a careful programme of further training appropriate for local ordained ministers will enhance the capacity for personal growth and sensitivity.

- 141 There may be a number of situations where it will be necessary to withdraw the appointment of a local ordained minister, who might then become supernumerary. However, long before such action would become necessary, congregations and ordained ministers will be called upon to deepen those qualities of trust, patience, honesty and generosity which underlie all attempts to build community. It is essential that such qualities underlie the whole development of LOM.
- 142 (iv) We expect that in the immediate future, local ordained ministers will constitute a small proportion of the whole. Problems relating to the itinerant principle need to be considered by Conference upon advice tendered by the Stationing Committee.

C4.3 Some Consequences of SOM and LOM

- 143 (a) **SOM, LOM and Candidature.** Up to the present, Methodist practice has been to assume that candidates for ordained ministry will exercise their ministry first in circuit appointments, after which some may apply to be appointed to a sector ordained ministry. The logic of the proposals in section C.4 of this report is that men and women may offer as candidates for SOM and LOM as well as for the itinerant ordained ministry. Procedures of candidature will need to be reviewed accordingly.
- 144 (b) **Relationship between SOM and LOM.** In describing SOM and LOM no attempt is made to *confine* the arena within which a particular ordained minister exercises his or her vocation – any more than a circuit minister is confined to a circuit for the exercise of his or her ministry. Thus an SOM may assist in a circuit on Sundays as an ordained minister; and an LOM will not stop being an ordained minister, and being known as such, in his or her place of work. The distinction between an SOM and an LOM is their *appointment*, and therefore in the description of the area where their formal responsibilities as an ordained minister are centred.

C4.4 Ordained Ministers Without Appointment (OMWA)

- 145 SO 762 (i) provides exemption from stationing for an ordained minister ‘on compassionate or compelling domestic grounds’. Earlier sections of this report (e.g. paras. 038, 139) justify this concept and suggest that the terms upon which ordained ministers might be so classified need to be broadened. It may then be appropriate to locate here some ordained ministers at present in ‘other appointments’.

C4.5 Episcopacy

- 146 The Methodist Church has been enriched by many forms of ‘episcopate’ (oversight). ‘This oversight is exercised both corporately and individually. It is exercised corporately, for example, by Conference, Synods, Circuit Meetings, Pastoral Committees and individually by the President, Chairmen, Superintendents, Ministers, Class Leaders’ (*Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, Section C.3). This report summarises and comments on this

Methodist practice in paras. 050-064, and provides its theological basis in paras. 041-048.

147 We judge that the time is not right for Methodism to introduce the historic episcopate into its system, for the following reasons:

(a) Sections C.2-4 of this report propose far-reaching changes in the structures of the Methodist Church. Their detailed implementation will absorb energy and imagination, if Conference approves them in principle. Concentrated application of resources to secure these changes in such a way as to win general approval throughout the church is a high priority for the Methodist Church as it pursues its mission in contemporary society.

(b) Any move unilaterally to take the historic episcopate into our system would at present be damagingly divisive within Methodism.

(c) We perceive the ecumenical situation to be uncertain and changing, so that the ecumenical implications of any such step would be unclear.

148 We recommend that if and when the church judges it right to incorporate the historic episcopate into its polity, it will espouse an understanding of episcopacy which coheres with the theology of leadership in section B of this report, the recommendations of the report *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, and the guidance given in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* ('Ministry', paras. 20-25).

C4.6 Nomenclature

149 People in the church will continue to refer to ordained ministers as 'ministers'. The word 'minister' will also be used by the world at large. Within the church, however, we must always be concerned to teach and to show that every Christian is called by God to be a minister. At district and connexional levels it will be convenient at times to distinguish the varied forms of ordained ministry. When this is done, the terminology will need to be appropriate and consistent, i.e. itinerant ordained minister (IOM), sector ordained minister (SOM), local ordained minister (LOM) and ordained minister without appointment (OMWA). However, to use these phrases as common language in the life of the church will confuse and divide the church and needlessly mystify the world.

RESOLUTION TO CONFERENCE

- (i) The Conference commends this report to the districts and circuits for discussion and comment.
- (ii) The Conference appoints a Commission to prepare detailed proposals for the implementation of this report, and to report to Conference in 1987.
- (iii) The Conference encourages the autumn Synods, District Committees, and Circuit Meetings and other appropriate groups to send comments to the Convenor of the Commission no later than February 28, 1987; and directs the Commission to present the report with any necessary modification for adoption by the Conference of 1987.

The Conference adopted resolution (ii), amended as follows:

‘The Conference appoints a Commission to prepare detailed proposals for implementation of the report, with separate resolutions for such proposals, and to report to the Conference of 1988.’

In place of resolutions (i) and (iii), the Conference adopted the following:

‘The Conference encourages the Synods, District Committees, Circuit Meetings and other appropriate groups to send comments to the Convener of the Commission no later than 30th September 1987; and directs the Commission to present the report with any necessary modification for adoption by the Conference of 1988.’

THE MINISTRY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1988)

01 Foreword

The Report on the Ministry of the People of God was brought to Conference in 1986. A commission was set up (i) to prepare detailed proposals to implement it; (ii) to receive comments from individuals and all appropriate bodies; and (iii) to present the Report with any necessary modifications for adoption by Conference in 1988 (Resolutions 1&2 in the original Report, not reprinted here).

To judge by the response and the care with which the submissions have in general been prepared, the Report has excited considerable interest among the Methodist people. We are grateful for all that has been sent to us. Together these submissions provide considerable help in assessing what the next steps should be.

A summary of the responses is included in tabular form in the appendix.

02 Method of procedure

- (i) In this preface there is a reply to certain general criticisms of the Report and an indication of the reasons for the direction of our proposals in the main areas of concern.
- (ii) There then follows the Report itself, incorporating such modifications as the commission felt to be necessary. Those parts which are new are marked by vertical sidelines in the text, or, where only details have been altered, by an asterisk in the left hand margin.
- (iii) Finally, we have made proposals for new standing orders and provided a list of recommendations.

03 Response to general criticisms

(i) *The Report was too complex and printed in type too small to be suitable for general discussion.*

We acknowledge the force of this criticism. On the one hand, it is important that matters of this kind should be dealt with in adequate theological depth; on the other, there are economic pressures affecting the format of the Agenda of Conference, from which the Report was reprinted.

We think that in remitting comparable reports for study in future, Conference should provide a summary in more accessible form and language.

(ii) *The Report was so far from being what was required that it needs to be rewritten in its entirety.*

This criticism does not reflect the general tenor of the submissions which we have received. Quite apart from the question whether it is justified, we have felt that such radical treatment of the Report would go beyond the intentions of the 1986 Conference resolution. This certainly envisaged modification, but not the substitution of entirely different proposals.

(iii) *The practical proposals in the Report do not reflect the theological discussion by which they are introduced.*

The objection here is that whereas the early paragraphs of the Report made a case for widening the notion of ministry to embrace the whole of Christ's church, the practical proposals were dominated by concern for the ordained ministry. The suggestions for a Methodist Order for Mission and Ministry, far from helping this situation, it is said, only made matters worse.

(a) To an extent we accept this criticism, and our proposals for lay ministries have been substantially altered to take account of it. We appreciate the danger that the original proposals might be divisive and that it could contradict the whole notion that every member has a ministry.

(b) On the other hand, the objection takes insufficient account of the need to rationalize arrangements for lay workers – particularly those in the paid employment of the church. Moreover, new initiatives in the use of ordained ministers need to be explored.

(c) The Report had a twofold objective. *One* aim was to open up for discussion the whole subject of ministry in the church, and to point out the need to explore further both the full employment of people's gifts within the fellowship of the church and the scope for ministry outside the confines of the church to the world at large. The Report did not make any claim to deal exhaustively with either of these matters. There is in any case a limit to the extent to which topics and concerns of this kind can be legislated for. Some of the positive things said here should enable greater experimentation in ministry particularly in the practice of team leadership. Furthermore, we understand that the President's Council is bringing to Conference proposals for an enquiry into the whole realm of expressing Christian ministry in the world.

The *second* aim was to give greater definition to a number of specific issues. Some of these are concerned with the ordained ministry. Others relate to lay people. It is to miss the point to complain that our practical proposals do not all address the first aim. But, of course, the solution of the problems offered here has to be consistent with that first aim.

(iv) A number of respondents were concerned that insufficient account had been taken of the ecumenical aspects of the matters with which the report dealt. Without any doubt, the authors of the Report were concerned about this issue, for it forms the background to all our work today. But we judge that we have an opportunity to speak primarily to the situation facing Methodism. The ecumenical context in which the local church and circuits exist varies greatly. We cannot deal here with all the difficulties in particular situations. We are proposing a process of development within which Methodism can deal with unrecognised problems as they become apparent. We believe that the general direction of our proposals will be understood and welcomed by our ecumenical partners.

04 **Issues relating to lay ministries**

i) The proposals in the original report

In the Report, it was proposed that a new lay order of ministry should be set up – the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry. Two factors have led to the

abandonment of this proposal: (a) the reopening of the Wesley Deaconess Order to receive candidates; (b) widespread dissatisfaction throughout the connexion with the proposals in the Report for the envisaged lay order.

Earlier it had been thought that if the Deaconess Order were reopened, it might have been possible to encompass it within the proposed new order. This never looked easy, and we decided to move in a different direction when the objections to this new order became apparent. The main difficulty has been felt to be that it would amount to giving some members of the church a label which all active Christians should really wear, and thus introduce what could only be invidious distinctions.

(ii) The future direction of the Wesley Deaconess Order

In the past, the Order has been open only to women, and its ministry has overlapped with that of presbyters (for the use of this word, see below para 05). Indeed this latter factor has been so dominant that when women were admitted to the presbyteral ministry, the effect was drastically to reduce for a time the number candidating for the Order, until in 1978 recruitment was suspended altogether.

Much of the speculative thinking about the different patterns and forms of diaconal ministry within Methodism has been overtaken by the fact that the 1986 Conference directed the Wesley Deaconess Order, through the Division of Ministries, to reopen for the candidature of both men and women. Certain requirements have been laid down to implement this by the Order. These, though settled for the time being, are not final.

There is to be a commitment to life-time diaconal service, and to full-time ministry until retirement, in whatever appointment is most appropriate, and wherever required in the itinerant system, except in compelling circumstances and with approval. There is also to be commitment to the fellowship and discipline of the Order.

The Order is connexionally based, and constitutes part of the ministry of the whole people of God. It is one expression of diaconal service, which is distinctive and complementary to presbyteral ministry. Hence members of the Order will not normally be placed in pastoral charge of churches. They will work alongside ministers and those who are not ordained, preferably within leadership teams.

The pattern emerging is thus an order parallel with that of presbyters, but distinct in function. Its name will be the 'Methodist Diaconal Order' (MDO), the men being called deacons, and the women deaconesses. After probation, they will be ordained as deacons and deaconesses in the church of God. As the Order is renewed, we believe that the contribution and value of this diaconal ministry will bring enrichment not only to Methodists, but also to the wider church of Christ.

(iii) Lay Workers

One of the contributory factors to the setting up of the original working party was the haphazard development of Lay Pastoral Assistant appointments (para 008). Not only has there been inadequate co-ordination, but anomalies have been unjust.

We recommend the use of the term 'Lay Worker' for appointments under SO 581, to indicate that there is a distinctive and complementary ministry to that of the ordained ministry and the Methodist Diaconal Order. We therefore propose that the term 'Lay Pastoral Assistant' be no longer used.

We wish to affirm the wide range of work done by Lay Workers and therefore recommend that these ministries should be strengthened by being brought within the oversight of the Division of Ministries:

- (a) to offer fellowship and pastoral support to those covered by SO 581, including the recommendation of a connexional annual conference for all Lay Workers.
- (b) to report judgement on schemes for proposed appointments under SO 581 in order to secure a degree of uniformity in conditions of service sufficient to redress the injustices of past practice;
- (c) to provide training and opportunities for mutual encouragement;
- (d) to promote interest in and development of these forms of lay ministry.

We recommend a widening of the appointments covered by SO 581 to include 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.

The Division of Ministries must be provided with the resources to do the work envisaged here. The Division has, until 1991, a total budget for training in lay ministry of about £25,000 per annum. Of this only about £3/4,000 has been available for the training and support of Lay Pastoral Assistants. Depending on the personnel and training involved, this will need to be supplemented to provide ongoing funds of something in the order of £40/50,000 per annum.

(iv) The ministry of all church members

The problems relating to certain forms of ministry figure largely in the practical section of the report. This is because it was explicitly part of the brief of the original working party to deal with these matters. But it has led to the impression that there was little concern in the minds of its writers, in spite of the title, for the role of the whole people of God. We have already addressed this criticism. Here we need to add that it is not by legislation but by effective teaching that the church is to be convinced that it is not a theatre in which the few are performers and the many spectators, but an organism in which every member contributes a distinctive ministry, both within the church and the world.

We are anxious to lose, however, none of the proposals contained in the Report (086e) for the extension of training in our church. We prepare Local Preachers with some thoroughness, but there is scope for training pastoral visitors, house-group leaders, treasurers and personal evangelists, to name but a few, as well as doing more to enable church members to express their ministry outside the church. However, we understand that the Division of Ministries is already preparing a programme to meet these needs, with the title,

‘Sharing in Christ’s ministry’. The Division is concerned to help churches and circuits recognize the possibilities for deploying a greater number of people in a wide range of non-ecclesial and ecclesial ministries and to provide suitable training.

The initiative taken by the President’s Council to help our people in the kind of ministry to the world which is achieved through the effective performance of a secular task will make an important contribution at this point (See 03 iii c). We draw attention too to what is said in the Report (para 073), which speaks of the dangers of professionalization in the ordained ministry and the consequent devaluing of the ministry of the whole people of God.

05 Issues relating to the ordained ministry

It may seem strange that in a report which emphasizes the point that all members of the body of Christ have a ministry we use the word ‘minister’ to refer exclusively to one who is ordained. But it is felt that the move, for example in the Service Book, to introduce the word ‘presbyter’ to refer to an ordained minister has not been successful, and that it is wiser to accept what is the widespread usage of our church.

(i) Itinerant ministers

The proposals of the Report which affect itinerant ministers have been well received. These should enable a more collaborative approach to ministry, opening new approaches to the organization of a circuit, three of which are as follows:

- (a) a team is set up consisting of some or all of the circuit ministers with or without other leaders operating in an employed or covenanted capacity;
- (b) a team is set up consisting of circuit ministers and others with pastoral or preaching gifts, who may well have employment as lay people in a secular capacity;
- (c) a team is set up consisting of the circuit ministers, the circuit stewards and other representative leaders to initiate policy for the Circuit General Purposes Committee.

The same models may be used within the more limited context of any one local church.

(ii) Ministers in Local Appointments

We deal below with objections to the proposals in the Report concerning Ministers in Local Appointments. But the commission does not wish to be defensive with regard to this category of minister. We remain persuaded that the concept offers both a means of meeting clamant needs within our church’s life and outreach, and also of affording scope for the exercise of the gifts of those who are suited for appointment to this sphere of ministry, who do not feel a call to itinerant ministry, or whose circumstances prevent it. The difficulties which have been pointed out in the responses we have received are seven in number and we list and answer them as follows:

- (1) The objection is raised that such a person will not be seen as a proper minister, and for this reason his or her status will be in doubt.

There should be no such doubts, since there is every intention of securing parity of all ordained presbyters, and no question of seeing those who fill this role as second-class.

- (2) The question will be: 'When and how will such ministers' appointments come to an end?'

Their secular job may continue indefinitely in the same place, and they will probably own a house from which they will not want to move. However, from the beginning, it will be clearly understood that the appointment will be, like that of an itinerant minister, for an initial term and subject to periodic extensions at the wish of the circuit. When the term is concluded, these ministers may (a) move their work and their home to another area where a local appointment is open for them, (b) take up another local appointment in a circuit close by, or (c) become 'ministers without appointment', a situation which was not provided for (as it is now), when comparable proposals were before the Conference previously.

- (3) If, as is envisaged, training is to be given of a quality such as to secure the parity of all presbyters, this may lead to a time of great stress during that period.

Certainly this objection indicates an important area of concern. Some have overstretched themselves and their families while training for the itinerant ministry under non-residential schemes. The solution may lie in the pace of the training. Involvement with the local church must be properly controlled during the period of training. Normally, training will take place before the appointment begins.

- (4) If Ministers in Local Appointments are in pastoral charge of a church, what will be the position when pressing pastoral needs arise, to which there will not be the possibility of immediate response?

Such ministers will not work in isolation. Their responsibilities and availability for service within the circuit will have been very carefully assessed. Such situations therefore as those envisaged can be met as appropriate by members of the circuit staff, colleagues in other denominations or lay pastoral leaders.

- (5) When the secular job done by a Minister in a Local Appointment comes to an end, and a move is necessary for that reason, what will be the status of the minister in the new circuit?

It is important to understand that ministry in local appointments, as here proposed, depends not only on the sense of call of the person concerned, but the existence of suitable work in the locality, based upon a scheme approved at circuit and district level. A minister in this category would become a minister without appointment until such time as a suitable opportunity presented itself.

- (6) The most suitable people to exercise such a ministry are likely to be situated in places where there is the least need for it.

Those with an urgent enough call might be able to move to an area where their services could be used, or travel from their existing homes to available ministerial work. But simply because some suitable people might not find scope for exercising their gifts is no reason for not implementing such an arrangement where it is feasible.

- (7) There is a danger that the emergence of Ministers in Local Appointments will inhibit the proper use of church members, and feed the illusion that it is only the ordained who are capable of carrying forward the work.

Presbyters, far from doing work that others can do, should stimulate others to work hitherto unattempted.

The concept of Ministers in Local Appointments has three objectives. (a) It will extend the opportunities for ministry. (b) It will open up possibilities for those who are called to the work, but for whom the itinerant ministry is inappropriate. (c) It will also help relieve the burden created by the present shortage of ministers. Where someone was given a limited assignment in a circuit, even if engaged in other work, whether secular or ecclesial, much could be done which at present is being left undone on account of excessive pastoral loads. It must be stressed that there is no question of foisting ministers in this category on circuits with misgivings about them, but rather the aim is to enable them to be used by those who want to use them.

(iii) Ministers in Sector Appointments

Here we are concerned with a category that already exists under the name 'Ministers in other appointments', though we propose to return to the use of the word 'sector'. This is a sociological term to describe an area of working life in the community at large, in which such ministers make their distinctive contribution. We are grateful for the work that has been done on the Report by a group serving in such appointments, who have given us their own insights into ministry. Some of their contributions have been incorporated into the body of the revised report in paras 117 onwards.

The critical comments and questions which have been made concerning that part of the Report which deals with Ministers in Sector Appointments have indicated the persistent opinion within some parts of the Methodist Church that such ministers are doing a job which could equally well be done by lay people. Conference has examined this viewpoint on a number of occasions and each time has reaffirmed its commitment to ministry in the Sectors. Some of the work done by those working in this area is innovative and pioneering; some arises from a deep sense of call and commitment to a particular sector; some is an indication of specific skills which some of our ministers possess or have been encouraged to acquire. Much of it brings new insights and resources into the life of the churches.

Some responses from circuits have questioned the desirability of allowing candidates for the ministry to offer for appointment in the sectors, or to move immediately after training into such a post. We believe that such cases are likely to be very rare and exceptional, and will in general be controlled by the ordinary process of candidature. Nevertheless, we propose that, if candidates have this clear intention, it be examined carefully, and specific recommendations concerning their offer be brought to Conference.

Other responses have indicated that some have found difficulty in discerning the difference between a Minister in a Sector Appointment and a Minister in a Local Appointment. In all forms of ministry there is some blurring at the edges. This is as true within the itinerant ministry as between the itinerant ministry and other forms. To some extent, it is a matter of emphasis. We wish to see this 'blurring' as a positive factor, rather than a negative one. But we do see an important distinction between Ministers in the Sectors and Ministers in Local Appointments depending on where they see the major thrust of their commitment, whether in the sector where they work, or in the local Christian community. Ministers in Sector Appointments will, of course, contribute in a variety of ways to local churches, though the primary arena for their ministry is the sector where they work. Ministers in Local Appointments, correspondingly, never cease to be ministers, whatever they do, though their main sphere of ministry is ecclesial.

The original Report, recognizing both the variety of sectors which ministers serve and the fact that some ministers are with ecumenical or church-servicing agencies, suggested that ministers should be identified in the Minutes of Conference as being either Ministers in Sector Appointments or Ministers in Other Appointments. Since the publication of the Report, Conference has decided to amend the format and content of the Minutes of Conference. Section 21, which has hitherto listed all ministers serving in the sectors will be deleted in future. We have amended para 117 of the Report, to take account of this.

One circuit pointed out the need for all ministers to receive pastoral care, and certainly there is a danger that Ministers in Sector Appointments may be deprived of this. But our proposals take account of this and we hope that the framework which will emerge will give these ministers both the freedom and the support, as well as the discipline, which is appropriate.

06 **Conclusion**

We recognize that the implementation of this report will not by itself achieve all that is necessary to reform the church's conception of ministry. It is important to emphasize that not everything can be effected by legislation, and that it is unrealistic to attempt too many far-reaching changes at once. But we believe that the practical proposals which we have made are both consistent with a biblical view of the church and constructive as contributions to the contemporary ecumenical debate. More important than the practical proposals is the challenge which we bring to every local church and every church member to address themselves to the need at every level to realize the ministry of the whole people of God.

THE REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

As presented to the Conference in 1986, with the Commission's amendments marked by vertical sidelines, or by asterisks for minor details or omissions.

Introduction

The Faith and Order Committee reported to the Conference of 1983 that a working party had been set up to study *'The Ministry of the People of God'*, taking account of all the work already done in this area by the Division of Ministries and the committee's own study on Vocation' (*Agenda* p.62).

In 1984 the Conference accepted the suggestion of the President's Council, commenting on a diversity of views regarding the introduction of episcopacy into Methodism after the failure of the Covenanting Proposals, that the period following the judgement of the Conference concerning the Report on the *Ministry of the People of God* 'will provide an appropriate context for discussing the possible acceptance within Methodism of various forms of ministry that are compatible with the understanding of ministry that the Conference has adopted (*Agenda* p.14)'.

The report of the President's Council noted in the same context that the Conference was committed to making a response in 1985 to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* statement. In similar vein, the Division of Ministries reported to the Conference of 1984 that the policy of its Board was that 'no further recommendation for the diversification of ministries be brought to Conference until it had defined its response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the report on the Ministry of the People of God to be brought by the Faith and Order Committee' (*Agenda*, p.210).

SECTION A: THE CONTEXT OF THE DISCUSSION OF MINISTRY

001 The Conference last adopted a report on ministry in 1974. It was entitled *Ordination*. That theme highlighted a recurrent concern which, because of its very complexity, merits reconsideration a decade later. A number of developments and concerns lead us to a fundamental re-examination of the ministry of God's people. We set out a number of items which, we believe, indicate the direction in which the Spirit is moving the church.

002 Emerging creative pressures

(a) A positive pressure is the church's increasing concern for and confidence in pursuing its mission. The emergence of a multi-faith society in the UK and more acutely the developing awareness of the secularity of the modern world have drawn forth new resources of imagination and courage. The Conference report *Sharing in God's Mission* (1985) examines the meaning of the church's mission and encourages the church to devise strategies for mission. This programme will require the use and development of all the manifold gifts of the whole people of God. Many Methodist aspire to understand their ministries in fresh ways; to explore new forms of Christian community and Christian proclamation; or to offer themselves to the church's mission for full-time or part-time paid employment. In this last instance, the offer of paid

service may not fall along the lines of our traditional authorised ministries (ordained minister, local preacher, class-leader or pastoral visitor, or worker with children or young people; see SO 581 [1] and [2]).

003 The emergence of the charismatic movement in Methodism has ‘encouraged Christians to expect and use the many gifts the Spirit gives, for building up the Body of Christ, and for witness and service to Christ in the world. These gifts include some which have commonly been neglected or undervalued in the church – for example, gifts of healing, prophecy, discernment and speaking in tongues. The most balanced exponents of the movement have, however, stressed that these in some ways more spectacular gifts must not detract from the centrality of gifts of caring, ministry and humble service’ (Dr J. Newton, *The Charismatic Movement in the life of the Church*, a paper commissioned by the President’s Council; *Agenda*, 1983, p.17).

004 (c) One significant aspect of the church’s rediscovery of the priority of mission is summarised in the phrase, ‘Mission alongside the Poor’. In calling for new awareness of the church’s responsibility to share God’s ‘bias to the poor’ and new resources to fund the programme of work, the Conference has introduced into Methodism an emphasis which may produce a radical redeployment of our normal resources of personnel and finance. If stationing policy should be significantly altered, better to express a strategy for mission, we shall need new ways of understanding how God calls into new life the latent skills, commitment and personal qualities of all his people. Only in this way, with limited resources, can we both initiate the new things God lays upon us and nurture the treasures in our contemporary church life.

005 **The call to Christian ministry**

The call to ministry can easily be misunderstood to refer only to the calling of an ordained minister.

All church members are called by God to exercise Christian ministry in general, and also specific Christian ministries.

All Christians are faced at different stages in their pilgrimage with challenges of life-style, commitment, change of direction and new areas of service and ministry.

The use of the word ‘minister’ as shorthand for an ordained presbyter must not lead us to think that the ordained are the only ones called to ministry. The confusion would be greatly reduced if the word ‘presbyter’ could be used to denote ‘ordained minister of word and sacraments’. But the attempt to popularize this word (if that is what the authors of the 1974 Ordinal intended) has not been successful. The continued use of the word ‘minister’ has to be conceded.

006 **The heritage of ecumenical debates about ministry**

Church unity discussions have occupied much time and energy in recent decades. The failure of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Scheme and the Churches Covenanting Proposals may be partly attributed to the massive and almost exclusive concentration in associated reports on ordination and the ordained ministry.

007 In 1985 the Conference formulated its response to the WCC statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. While welcoming much of the material about ministry in this statement, it judged that ‘too much space is devoted to the ordained ministry’ and affirmed that ‘greater attention to the ministry of the whole people of God might have revealed a convergence that would have facilitated discussion of the vexed questions relating to ordination’ (*Agenda*, pp. 572, 581).

008 **Haphazard developments in non-ordained ministries**

Without systematic reflection on the ministries of the non-ordained, the church is left with pragmatic *ad hoc* developments. Methodism has had a goodly number of these in recent years; for example: the decision not to recruit further to the Wesley Deaconess Order (1978); the emergence of lay pastoral assistants working full-time or part-time in circuits under the direction of the Superintendent and within the terms of an agreed contract; the participation of non-ordained people with ordained in leadership teams and in experimental local church constitutions; and the confused discussion of the proposal to create a diaconate within Methodism. For new proposals concerning a Methodist diaconate, see above Preface, para 04 (ii) and paras 084-088.

009 **Haphazard developments in ordained ministry**

While so much energy has been diverted to discussion of ordination in inter-church debate, little energy has remained for careful reflection upon the development of ordained ministry *within* Methodism. The result is a confusing array of discussions, decisions and developments. For example,

- (a) The 1978 Conference refused to institute a local ordained ministry, but agreed a motion which declared that ‘the coming great church will be congregational, presbyteral and episcopal in its life and order’. In 1981 the Conference recommended for study a report on *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, and this matter has not yet been resolved (*Agenda*, 1984, pp. 14-16).
- (b) In many parts of the church’s life, leadership teams or ‘collaborative ministry’ have become important themes. But CPD offers no definition of team ministry, nor any insight about the relationship of team ministry to circuit ministry. (See now, however, Preface para 05 (i) and proposed new standing orders). The Home Mission Division recognises certain team ministries (SO 540 [3]), but they are not indicated on the list of Stations.
- (c) Conversely, informal evidence suggests that in many circuits ministers have become increasingly confined to the section of their circuit where they have pastoral charge, and decreasingly ‘circuit-conscious’.
- (d) Women have been ordained in the Methodist Church since 1974, but there has been little discussion of how our understanding and practice of ordained ministry should be influenced by our experience of the ordained consisting of a community of women and men.

SECTION B: EXPLORING THE TRADITION

010 In this section we examine notions such as ministry, vocation and leadership, giving special attention to the way these and related themes occur in the Bible and touching on aspects of their development in the history of the church. These discussions provide a pattern of thinking with which to review our understanding of ordination.

B.1. MINISTRY

011 The ministry of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the revealer and focus of God's mission in and to the entire created order. Jesus Christ proclaimed and enacted God's saving love for creation; he articulated and lived out the human response which God desires and God's love makes possible – love of God and love of one's fellow human beings. (Mk 12:28-31; Mt 5:43-48). The words of Jesus, his actions, his passion and death on the cross together constituted his ministry (Mk 10:45). Though this is all anchored in its place in history, the spirit of the risen and ascended Christ gives his ministry efficacy in every generation.

012 In the ancient world, the word 'ministry' signified menial and lowly tasks; originally a minister was a waiter at table. Jesus constantly emphasized that the proclamation of God's kingdom and obedience to God's will required humble and costly love (Lk 22:25-27; Jn 13:1-17).

013 The ministry of the church

The church of Jesus Christ has come into being as a result of God's free and sovereign choice (Eph 1:4). God's spirit creates, sustains and guides the church. The aims of the church on earth are:

to worship God who has graciously revealed himself and effected salvation for the world in Jesus Christ (Col 3:16-17);

faithfully to participate as a community in God's continuing mission to the world (Mt 28:18-20; 1 Pet 2:9);

to enable its members to build up one another in faith, hope and obedient love (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-13).

These aims constitute the church's ministry. The authenticity of the church's ministry is judged by its desire and capacity for witnessing to Jesus Christ.

014 Faith and ministry

The church comprises all who respond in faith to God's mercy in Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:4-10). By faith we become new beings in Christ; we enter a new life in the Spirit and in the fellowship of God's people. The Spirit sanctifies us (1 Cor 6:11; II Thess 5:23), make us God's saints, set apart for God's service (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Our service, or ministry is the life of love for God and for others which the Spirit makes possible (Rom 5:5). Thus every Christian at the time of being called to faith (1 Cor 1:26) is called also to ministry. *This is the general calling into ministry of the people of God: all Christians, in*

receiving God's grace, hear also God's demand to become transformed into the image of Christ, who is Lord and who is perfect love (II Cor 3:18; 1 Cor 13:1-14:1; Mk 10:42-45; Gal 5:13).

015 **Ministry in the world and in the church**

In the New Testament period, converts heard the apostolic preaching and became linked with the worshipping community. Baptism was the way of entering the church; it also focused powerfully the relationship between God's saving grace, the response of faith and the commissioning which all Christians receive to a life of love and service (para 014; Acts 2:38, 10:37-38; Rom 6:1-14; 1 Cor 12:13). Within the continuing worship of the churches, the early Christians experienced activities and relationships which symbolised life in the kingdom of God. Prominent among them were the generous sharing of gifts and possessions (Rom 12:8; Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37); slaves and free sharing equally in the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:23-34); and the welcome of Gentiles and Jews into the people of God on the same terms (Acts 10-11; Gal 2:1-9, 3:28). None of these was without controversy (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:11-21).

016 The community at worship provided metaphors which illuminated God's call to ministry in daily life and work as well as in the church. Obedience to God in the world was perceived as a sacrificial offering to God (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:18-21), analogous to the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving in the worship of the church (Heb 13:15). In general, cultic language was transferred to the total life of the whole people of God. All Christians without distinction were by one author called priests (Rev 1:6), or were said by another author to constitute a priesthood (1 Pet 2:5,10). Christians as Spirit-filled individuals or as a spiritual community became God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:21-22). This theme was built upon the insight that God's presence was not confined to the church at worship, but was available everywhere (Jn 4:20-24), so that traditional distinctions between sacred and profane were transcended (Hebrews *passim*), or at least drastically altered (II Cor 6:14 - 7:1; Mt 7:6).

017 There were, however, practical distinctions between the outworking of Christian ministry in the world and in the church. In the world, Christians were dispersed and involved in groups and institutions dedicated to ends other than the glory of God in Jesus Christ (Section B.2). Each church was a gathering in community of Christian believers, with its own internal needs and distinct functions in the service of God's mission (Section B.3).

B.2 CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES IN DAILY LIFE AND WORK

018 **The New Testament picture**

The New Testament letters gave more attention to the nurture of the church than to Christian discipleship in the world. This emphasis reflected the early churches' needs; it reflected also the minority status of Christians in the secular world, and their expectation in the near future of the Lord's return and the consummation of God's kingdom. General ethical advice was given about life in the world (Rom 12:14-21, 13:1-7), which in some writings was expressed almost as codified Christian wisdom for living within secular

institutions (Col 3:18 – 4:1; Eph 4:21 – 6:9; 1 Pet 2:18 – 3:7). Paul was especially concerned for Christians to make a good impression in the world (1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Cor 6:1-6, 10:32).

019 **Historical perspectives**

In the early centuries of the church, discussion of daily life and work continued largely to emphasize the general notion of being a Christian wherever the individual happened to be in society (para 014). As far as the evidence allows us to judge, relatively little attention was given to helping individual Christians to face the question where God wanted them to be and what God wanted them to do in society (a specific 'secular vocation', i.e. a vocation as a Christian centred upon daily life and work in the world); or to become aware of distinctive gifts which God had given them for the service of others (a specific ministry in society).

020 In the Middle Ages there was a tendency for a double standard of ethical behaviour to prevail. Christians in the secular sphere had indeed to live by the commands of the gospel, but a more intense form of holiness (sometimes called 'counsels of perfection') had to be practised by those who were ordained or in religious orders. The religious orders (which later included the orders of friars) were open to the non-ordained. Over the centuries there was a tendency too for the male orders to become increasingly clerical. In reaction to this restricted idea of vocation, Martin Luther and John Calvin encouraged the abolition of the religious orders. The orders were forcibly suppressed by Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell in Britain. Today they again provide a way of prayer and devotion to some who feel called to the contemplative life.

021 Luther also held that a person's social position, civic duties and daily work were a gift of divine providence. He applied the word 'vocation' to every Christian, ordained and non-ordained alike. Christians were to see their occupations as means of rendering obedience to God through serving their fellow-citizens. This way of thinking was one aspect of the notion of the priesthood of all believers. Within the Lutheran Church 150 years were to pass before Philipp Spener developed that theme on a considerable scale and gave it particular expression in Pietism.

022 In other streams of Protestant thought, notably the Reformed tradition, importance was attached to the discernment of and the honest and undistracted pursuit of a Christian's calling, which was now identified with paid employment. This sometimes left little room for sympathy with the plight of the unemployed or of those who were able to obtain only casual employment.

023 In Lutheran and Reformed thought a strong sense of vocation attached to the person who was called to pastoral charge of a congregation. In him, vocation in its highest sense, pastoral charge and a revised notion of clerical order came together. This clear picture of the ordained person was less characteristic of the Church of England, which continued to have a body of ordained men who were not in pastoral charge, – a lingering echo of medieval traditions. Methodism has cause to be grateful for this phenomenon, because it gave us John and Charles Wesley.

024 Methodism after the Wesleys largely adopted the Protestant pattern, in which a strong sense of vocation is attributed to an ordained person, who is normally set apart full-time for pastoral and evangelistic ministry. Understanding of ordained ministry in Methodism has been influenced by many diverse developments in social life and theological fashion, and the way in which Methodist ministers have been deployed has changed accordingly. A corporate discipline, linked to the idea of an order, has provided continuity.

025 A call to preach, as distinct from a call to the ordained ministry, has been a feature of Methodism not fully in accord with classical protestantism. Though the vocabulary of vocation has not been used to refer to the self-understanding of non-ordained church members reflecting on the relation of faith to daily work, however, Victorian Methodism was characterized by a great ethical earnestness and concern for the wider community. This was often expressed through service in national and charitable organizations and particularly in local government. Certain occupations and types of leisure activity emerged which reflected 'holy living' in the world. Significant contributions were made to the development of trades unions and to social and political life at all levels; Methodists found their way in great numbers into the caring professions, such as teaching, medicine and nursing. In their leisure they worked – voluntarily as a rule – with children and young people and showed a special care for the elderly and the destitute. A sense of responsibility and even self-sacrifice is characteristic of many Christians in these spheres today.

026 God's call to every Christian to serve Christ in today's world

In contemporary society a bewildering range of opportunities and frustrations face Christian people as they attempt to discern particular jobs or activities about which they say, 'God has called me to do this'. That all life should be dedicated to the way of costly love is clear (para 014). But how are choices to be made between one career and another? On what criteria does a mother or a father balance competing claims between career development and bringing up a family? How does paid employment relate to leisure or to community service? What meaning can be given to a potential career cut short by unemployment or the rapidly changing needs of society?

027 The church needs constantly to develop pastoral skills to assist its members in dealing with questions of these kinds, and in connecting such answers as may emerge to the variety of callings from God to every Christian to serve him inside and outside the life of the church.

028 Each individual brings to the discussion of 'God's call to every Christian' a rich and complex story. Church members should be given greater opportunity to express and share this part of their testimony.

029 (i) A Christian needs to reflect on those daily occupations and areas of service which bring a sense of personal fulfilment. Sometimes the individual Christian is aware of powers, gifts and potential which cry out for further development and expression. In consultation with others a Christian may look for new or additional contexts where newly awakened gifts and newly acquired skills can be employed in witnessing to Christ and serving either the well-being of society or the true harnessing of the natural order.

- 030 From the perspective of faith, these experiences constitute an invitation to discern where one's obedience might lie and to reflect on one's calling. There is a balance to be kept between the call to respond to situations of need which require little more than willingness to serve and the call to direct our lives in the paths indicated by abilities one has been given, or experiences one has accumulated.
- 031 It is important to affirm the enormous range of activities (paid work, voluntary service and in the area of family relationships) which can become for Christian people the context for their call to serve.
- 032 The call to serve God in a specific situation outside the life of the church can vary in length. Some Christians are given one particular ministry which is lifelong. Others discover that they are given a short-term call, and when it is complete or ended by circumstances, they await or seek a further call from God in some new arena of service.
- 033 (ii) Sometimes, however, Christians feel keenly restrictions and restraints preventing significant choices in life. Personal capacities (e.g. physical strength, intellectual abilities, practical skills) are severely limited. Economic necessities, or arbitrary circumstances of birth and upbringing, may drastically limit possibilities. Many Christians in such situations then accept as graciously as possible the limits of the contribution they can make to the well-being of society and the natural order; what tasks can be done are gladly performed to the glory of God. In such circumstances, however, the concept of a calling is not normally appropriate; but the gospel leaves such Christians in no doubt of their worth as people, nor of their general calling into a life of love and service (014).

B.3 ECCLESIAL MINISTRIES

034 To build up the church

'Let all things be done for edification' (1 Cor 14:26) is a theme which underpins all the particular ministries in the church for which God chooses or sets apart individuals. Because the church is part of human history, it is exposed to the dangers of false teaching, the intrusion of worldly values and the ravages of sin (Gal 1:6-9; 1 Jn 2:18-25; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Mt 13:24-30). Individual Christians err and fail, and conflicts arise between Christian brothers and sisters. Ministry can be sacrificial, since it is a consequence of the life-giving of the cross which we share (II Cor 5:14-6:10; Col 1:24-27; Phil 3:10-11; John 10:7-18). Christians therefore need to minister to one another (Mt 18:15-20); and the church as a whole, embodying the richness of the grace manifested in Christ (Eph 4:11-16), must guide, support and discipline its members (1 Cor 5:4; 1 Thess 5:19-22), and assess critically its continuing relationship to the gospel message (1 Cor 15:1-2; Gal 1:6-9). Only those who know their need of God's grace and humbly receive ministry from their fellow-Christians can be channels of God's self-giving love (Jn 13:1-10).

035 All Christians share in the ministry of Christ

In the Pauline churches it was taken for granted that each individual Christian was given a specific ecclesial ministry. In 1 Cor 12, each Christian is said to receive a gift or gifts from the one Spirit, and these gifts constitute the various functions within the body (also Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 16:1-4; Eph 4:7-16). Certainly the worship of the church was the corporate responsibility of all the participants (1 Cor 14, especially vs 26). It is not clear whether this picture was taken for granted by all the NT authors and churches; but our conviction is that the church is most truly what God wants it to be when each Christian, with the help of the Christian community, discerns, develops and uses the Spirit's gifts in ministry.

036 Discerning vocation to ecclesial ministries

The matching of gifts to individuals with their tasks in and for the church is a subtle and sensitive procedure, involving discernment and testing. The following patterns have been evident in the church throughout its history:

The whole church, together with the individual concerned, recognises in a person the gifts needed for a particular piece of work or long-term task.

The church recognises in an individual the gifts and graces needed for a specific ministry; even though those concerned may be unaware of their potential in that area of service or reluctant to offer themselves for the work required, the church calls them to fulfil this ministry.

An individual is inspired by the Spirit to initiate a particular project or serve a need; the church fails at the time to discern the Spirit's work and only belatedly recognises and honours such a prophetic ministry.

The church has important needs which on the surface seem incapable of being met with the limited talents of its members; God through his Spirit gives the gifts through which the church may continue and grow in its mission.

037 Varied in length and nature

There is a rich diversity of words and phrases in the NT (30 in all) used to describe the tasks of individual Christians. Specific forms of church service were diverse in nature (1 Cor 12:5; Rom 12:6-8) and in length. For example:

The Seven were chosen to attend to the needs of the neglected widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3-5), so that their work was limited in scope.

Others were appointed to short-term tasks, such as those who gathered up the collection for the Jerusalem church (II Cor 8:17-19).

Paul was set apart for the life-long task of preaching the gospel among the Gentiles (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15; Acts 9:15).

038 (a) There is nothing in the NT which implies that the importance of a specific ministerial task is related to *the time that must be devoted to it* for its proper fulfilment.

039 (b) The importance of particular ministries is not judged on whether or not *they merit income* for those who fulfil them from the wider church community. In the NT period some did receive payment; others did not (1 Cor 9:3-18; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17).

040 (c) It is also unwise to discriminate rigidly between ministries in terms of the form of commissioning used for any specific task. In the NT churches there was a wide range of acts of commissioning. These included verbal commissioning (Mk 3:14; Jn 20:17, 21-23); negotiated agreements sealed with the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9); election by show of hands (II Cor 8:19); prayer and casting lots (Acts 1:23-26); prayer and laying on of hands (Acts 6:6), accompanied sometimes by fasting (Acts 13:2-3). In the last mentioned category we can discern in the Pastoral Letters the beginnings of the custom which in the later church became the regular method of ordaining elders (1 Tim 4:14, 5:22; II Tim 1:6). We must recall, however, that the NT is silent about the form of commissioning used in a wide range of varied ministries. And even some of the well-established forms carried subtle variations of meaning and significance in different contexts in the rapidly developing life of the churches in the first century. Imposition of hands, for example, expressed not only the idea of appointment, or ordination, to office in a congregation, but also, in different situations, the meanings of blessing (Mk 10:16), healing (Acts 9:17) or conveying the Spirit to new converts (Acts 8:17).

041 Leadership

Issues of *authority and leadership* were inevitably part of the church's experience from the beginning (1 Thess 5:12-13). Leadership is among the relatively small handful of ecclesial ministries given great prominence in the NT (Acts 1:15-26; Rom 10:14-17, 12:6-8, 15:16; 1 Cor 12:28-30; Eph 2:20, 4:11-13; Heb 13:7, 17). There can be no church community without a leader or team of leaders.

042 Leadership is given by the Spirit

Thus (a) In the Christian view, attention is focused on the personal and spiritual qualities of those with a vocation to lead. Autocracy, authoritarianism, self-seeking and manipulation of other people are unacceptable. Servanthood modelled on the ministry of Jesus is basic (Mk 10:45; Jn 13:1-17). Leadership is a ministry. In Paul's experience (II Cor 4:1-12) leadership involved the capacity to enter deeply into another's weakness, hurt and confusion, and to speak creatively out of the leader's own vulnerability so that the other person found new life and courage.

043 (b) Leadership cannot be confined to those formally authorised as leaders. Leadership can arise spontaneously or from an unexpected quarter when a situation demands that an initiative be taken (1 Cor 6:5, 12:28, 16:15). Those formally authorised as leaders exercise their oversight by encouraging church members to contribute their gifts and, where appropriate, to take initiatives, and to enable and sustain the gifts of their partners in ministry. They also carry responsibility for the church remaining true to its nature and mission (II Cor 11:28; Phil 1:9-11).

044 New Testament examples of leadership

(a) Paul the apostle

Paul's primary task as an apostle was to pioneer the life of Christ in new places (Rom 15:20-21). His particular vocation to preach to the Gentiles (Rom 15:16) was part of a larger task of proclaiming the gospel and creating Christian communities among Jews as well as Gentiles (Gal 2:9; Rom 11:13ff), and of drawing all into one in Christ (Gal 3:28).

045 Paul's authority derived from: his sense of call from God through the risen Christ (II Cor 4:1; Gal 1:12-16); his sharing in the common tradition of faith (1 Cor 15:1-11); the recognition given to his work by other accredited authorities (Gal 2:9); his founding of churches (1 Cor 9:2; II Cor 11:2); and the sincerity and integrity of his life (II Cor 1:12, 4:2). He embodied the life and the dying of Christ (II Cor 4:11; Gal 6:14, 17). So he could address the church: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1).

046 Paul did not work alone. His co-workers were indispensable assistants (1 Cor 1:1; II Cor 8:6); he always relied upon material and prayerful support from existing congregations (Phil 4); he expected other ministries to overlap with and complement his own (1 Cor 1:14-17, 3:5-9). There should be no simplistic view of the situations described in the New Testament. Leadership and its style were often conditioned by crisis situations. James the brother of Jesus is a crucial example of one who exercised strong leadership. Clearly there were tensions between James and Peter on the one hand and Paul on the other (Gal 1:19; Gal 2; Acts 15). Questions of continuity, as far as we know, did not loom large in the apostolic period. The apostles had a unique role in the foundation of the church, which precluded repetition (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 15:1-11).

047 (b) Elder

The Greek word *presbuteros* is a fluid word which, in different contexts, can take one of a range of meanings. It can mean 'old', 'venerable' or 'elder/presbyter'. Thus in 1 Tim 5:1-2 older persons are referred to; in 1 Tim 5:17 'elder' is the most natural translation. Behind this flexibility of meaning lies an assumption taken for granted in the ancient world, that wisdom and leadership belonged naturally to the older members of society. Greater age elicited greater deference. Longevity thus becomes an aspiration because it merited respect, influence and authority (Ps 91:16). In the Jewish synagogue the elders played their part as leaders because of their social standing in the wider community. At least by the end of the first century and possibly earlier, some Christian churches were organizing local leadership on a similar pattern (fn 3).

048 Elders operated a team leadership (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5), and it may be that the 'bishop' referred to in 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:5-6 was head of the team of elders. Appointment was by laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22; II Tim 1:6). Although the institution of elders may have owed much to Jewish precedents, it was given a distinctively Christian colouring: elders must display high moral qualities (Tit 1:5-6; 1 Pet 5:1-11); leadership must be open to all, as God calls, and not just to the elderly (1 Tim 3:1, 4:12); their authority depends on their

faithfulness in handing on the apostolic tradition of faith and teaching (1 Tim 6:20; 11 Tim 1:14, 2:20).

049 **The trend of historical developments**

Within the New Testament, churches began moving at different rates and along different routes from communities which expected an imminent end to history towards settled institutions preparing for a long-term future. When a single descriptive term is used for a particular ministry, we cannot assume that within the literature, the name carries a fixed meaning. The Greek work *diakonos*, for example, is variously translated in different contexts as 'minister', 'servant' and 'deacon'. In the second and third centuries there continued to be diverse patterns of leadership and varied theological understandings of leadership (including some whose origin lay outside the NT). Increasingly, however, a single pattern of ordained leadership emerged of bishops, presbyters and deacons. This represented the church's experience that the true nature of the church and its mission were expressed in a leadership which was combined in various ways with the *ministries of the word, the sacraments and pastoral care*. The fact that these ministries were integral to the church's life did not negate the truth that in local situations there were always other important and needful ministries determined by local circumstances; or that in different periods a rich variety of groups and communities arose to witness to aspects of Christian faith in danger of being neglected.

050 **Methodist styles of leadership**

(a) One of the distinctive features of Methodism is its adoption of *collective forms of leadership*, most notably in the Conference (e.g. Deed of Union clauses 3(a) and 22), in the Circuit Meeting (SO 512) and in the Church Council, whose responsibilities are defined as follows: 'The general oversight of the Local Church shall be undertaken by the Church Council, exercising leadership over the whole field of the church's concern' (SO 616).

051 (b) *Individual forms of leadership* find their place and purpose within the representative decision-making groups. For example, SO 623 defines the general responsibilities of church stewards as follows: 'The church stewards are corporately responsible with the minister or probationer having pastoral charge of 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'.

052 (c) Significant and distinctive leadership is provided by *ordained ministers* who have 'a principal and directing part' within the great duties of being 'Stewards in the household of God and Shepherds of His flock' (CPD pp. 61-62).

053 (d) The key to effective leadership in the church is to ensure that the reasons for the existence of the church and its short-term objectives, following from those reasons are understood, agreed and owned by all the members of the church (para 013). Leadership of this kind gives to all members an equal

responsibility in achieving the church's aims, and liberates them to take initiatives in pursuing these aims. It cannot be stressed too strongly that *good leadership releases, encourages and facilitates the putting to good use of the enormous variety of gifts among all God's people in the service of the church.*

- 054 (e) A neglected form of leadership is the *ministry of visitation*. In the biblical tradition the verb 'to visit' characteristically describes God's looking up individuals or the people with a concern for their welfare. His visitation was focused in Jesus (Lk 1:68, 1:78, 7:16, 9:1-10); it brought blessings to the weak and disadvantaged (Mt 25:36, 43; Jas 1:27), but judgement to the disobedient and blind (Lk 19:43-44). The ministry of visitation to churches is practised by a leader (or a team of leaders) visiting a church from outside to bring a fresh and critical perspective to its understanding of its life and work (Acts 11:22-24, 15:36).
- 055 John Wesley exercised such a ministry to the earliest Methodist societies. The ordained ministers carried on this tradition through the short-term itinerancy and the particular responsibility of the quarterly visitation of the classes (SO 525 [1]). Visiting preachers made an informal contribution. It has traditionally been expected that the superintendent minister will visit all the churches of a circuit to encourage, support and challenge the members of the society. However, contemporary Methodism does not have a widespread system of classes which meet; and expectations about length of appointment of ministers have changed considerably in recent decades, as have the expectations about the relationship of an ordained minister to the locality where he or she resides and to churches in his or her pastoral charge.

056 **Ministers of word, sacraments and pastoral care in the Methodist tradition**

The Ministry of the Word

This has many aspects. It includes:

- witness and evangelism in secular contexts, by which men and women are called to faith;
- the creation of new Christian communities and groups in situations where Christ is not known or honoured;
- study and exposition of the scriptures;
- preaching the gospel and teaching within the worship of the church;
- parents in the home and teachers in Junior Church teaching children about God;
- the work of theologians (an increasing number of whom are not ordained).

057 **The ministry of the sacraments**

Baptism and Holy Communion are corporate acts of celebration involving the whole congregation. Participation by a range of individuals in the preparation of these services (e.g. church and communion stewards, baptismal roll secretary) and in their conduct (reading from the Bible, preaching, leading intercessions, accompanying hymns, assisting with the distribution of bread and wine) enhances the corporate nature of the event. In Methodist practice

and discipline it is normal for an ordained person to administer the Sacrament of Baptism and to preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper; Conference makes arrangements for variation from this rule (MSB p.A3, para 122; SO 011; 'Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper', *Agenda*, 1984, pp. 24-27).

058 The ministry of pastoral care

Pastoral care involves Christians in God's continuing work of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling and enabling people to co-operate for the well-being of human communities and in the struggle for justice, freedom and peace. This ministry too takes many forms, and is strengthened by many and various contributions, formal and informal, from church members. One main purpose of pastoral care is to enable Christians to develop as ministers in the general sense, i.e. increasingly to dedicate their lives to the way of loving service. Necessarily, therefore, pastoral care includes the help given to Christian people to discern their vocations, in the church and in the world.

059 General observations on the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care.

(a) *Each of these ministries is normally exercised in a variety of ways by a large number of Christians* both in the world and in the church (fn4). The ministry of the word, for example, can happen informally when a Christian bears testimony to his or her faith; or it can happen more formally when an accredited local preacher or ordained minister delivers a sermon. Thus the exercise of these crucial ministries should be viewed as a collaborative activity.

060 (b) *Each of these forms of ministry needs its own leadership.* A leader of such a ministry carries great responsibilities. It is therefore vital for the well-being of the church that such a leader be accountable to the church as a whole. This requires a rigorous discipline and proper authorisation for leaders in these ministries, but not necessarily for all who share in these ministries with the leader. Thus in the circuit situation it is obviously right to give connexional recognition and commissioning to a local preacher after appropriate training and examination. It seems right also to continue the established custom in local churches of formally recognising and commissioning class leaders, pastoral visitors, and workers with children and young people.

061 (c) *Leadership* in the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care needs to be exercised in a manner which encourages church members to share in them. (See again note 4). The impression is sometimes given, both to those authorised to these ministries and also to members not so authorised, that the performance of these ministries, which are crucial to the church's identity and purpose, may be left to those formally recognised and commissioned. Then proclaiming God's word is confined to the local and ordained preachers, pastoral care to class leaders, and so forth. Gifts and insights of diverse and enriching kinds in the congregation lie unused; or church members lose confidence in the value of their informal contributions. By encouraging its members to share in these important ministries, the church broadens the ways in which they may be understood. Gifts of healing or teaching, for example, widen the church's experience of pastoral care and the ministry of the word respectively (paras. 056-058). The quiet, supportive and prayerful ministry

which many church members give to those who carry specific responsibilities or who initiate new ministries is an invaluable contribution in itself; it is also the means of sharing in those tasks upon which the church's identity and purpose rest.

062 (d) We believe it would be valuable if churches could *recognise in informal ways* the many and various ministries which the Church needs and needs to release. The Covenant Service is one appropriate context for this; in addition particular persons and specific ministries could be mentioned regularly in the prayers of the church.

063 **The relation between leadership ministries and the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care**

It is not *necessary* for those appointed to positions of leadership (eg church and circuit stewards, Divisional Secretaries [fn 5]) also to exercise formal and accredited roles in the ministries of word, sacraments and pastoral care, though they may do so.

064 Ordained ministers may, in the first instance, be defined as those persons who are called by God to a ministry which combines a ministry of oversight (which may be exercised at circuit, district or connexional level) with formal leadership in the ministries of the word, sacraments and pastoral care.

065 **The meaning of ordination**

The office, or role, of the ordained minister focuses the calling of the church as a whole (see paras 013, 043).

066 Those whom God calls to the ordained ministry cannot expect adequately to fulfil the role, either individually or collectively. However, to point as accurately as possible to the ideal, the church tests a vocation to ordained ministry at every level of its life, looking for appropriate gifts or the potential to develop appropriate gifts, and seeking also evidence of personal Christian maturity and openness. It trains accepted candidates and places them under discipline with respect to stationing, character, fidelity and competence (SO 481 [iii]). In the Methodist Church, commitment to the ordained ministry has been understood to be life-long.

067 The 1974 report on *Ordination* summed up the theology of ordination as follows: 'As a perpetual reminder of (the calling of the people of God) and as a means of being obedient to it, the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church and through the Church to the world' (para 014).

068 **The focus of the church's ministry: individual and corporate.**

The ordained ministry, like every other ecclesial ministry, must be set firmly within the church and its aims. Some account must therefore be given of the precise relationship between ordained ministry and the focal significance for

the church of non-ordained leadership in the ministries of the word and of pastoral care [fn 6] and of all other ministries of leadership. Distinct emphases may be discerned in the Methodist tradition.

069 Some have seen *the ordained minister as an individual always leading and focusing the diverse leadership ministries in the church.*

070 Others have seen *the ordained ministry in partnership with all other leadership ministries together focusing in each context the calling of the whole church.*

071 We wish to underline our belief that the pluralist nature of the contemporary Methodist Church and the history of the Methodist tradition require us to recognize that Christ's ministry in his church is validly expressed both through a focal person and through conciliar and collaborative models of leadership. Methodism flourishes when these models of ministry are seen as complementary and mutually enhancing.

072 In each Methodist community Ministers and Ministers in Local Appointments, Deacons and Deaconesses, Lay Workers, Local Preachers, Stewards, and other lay leaders and workers will often need to work as a team in ways that some of them may never have done before. If new leadership and collaborative skills are to emerge, this approach will require reflection, planning and training.

073 **Professionalism and the ordained ministry.**

In recent generations the professionalisation of the ordained ministry has increased in line with the professionalisation of much of society. The emergence of the professions has been a mixed blessing. The benefits to the ordained ministry have been demonstrated in a deeper concern for standards of training, levels of competence in the performance of tasks, and accountability of ordained ministers to one another. These gains have derived from an understanding of professionalism which stresses that skills and knowledge are developed among professionals with a view to the professionals working with other people and enabling others to take a responsible share in appropriate tasks. Our congregations expect competence and theological knowledge from ordained ministers. They have an important part to play both in transmitting theological knowledge and in enabling their congregations to think theologically and to realize their own theological skills and insights. However, theology is not confined to the experts, but is for all. There are familiar difficulties which arise in all professions from the fact that members of a profession do acquire a body of knowledge and experience which separates them from other people. Thus: the gap between the training and competence of the professional and the relatively undeveloped gifts and skills of those who are not professionals is so large that co-operation becomes difficult if not impossible; professional groups are constantly tempted to believe that they are the sole guardians of expertise and insight in their area of competence; professions can therefore become defensive, self-perpetuating, oppressive and indifferent to the needs and wisdom of those they are intending to serve; and conversely, non-professionals easily become unduly dependent upon professional expertise and lose confidence in their own gifts and skills.

- 074 The benefits and the difficulties of the professionalisation of the ordained ministry are evident within Methodism. The difficulties need to be more widely and critically discerned throughout the church. Ordained ministers need to develop their professional practice with a clearer understanding of its strengths and limitations in the life of the church and the world. Issues to be faced in the pursuit of collaborative styles of leadership include the following:
- 075 (a) *New styles of leadership.* What may appear as a too highly professionalized style of leadership, owing to the preponderance of men in the ordained ministry, ought not to provide the only model of leadership. Alternative styles of leadership should be encouraged. Insight from women, ethnic minority groups and social groups other than the predominantly male middle or lower middle class would be helpful.
- 076 (b) *Using conflict creatively.* In a highly institutionalised community like Methodism with established professional leadership in the ordained ministry, it is difficult for leaders also to be self-critical, and thereby to fulfil a prophetic ministry.
- 077 Leaders in secular communities have frequently recognised the value of the person without status who brings a profoundly critical perspective to the prevailing values and concerns of those in authority; hence the jester in the king's court, the clown in the circus, or the role of the investigative journalist in modern society. Ordained ministers in particular need structures where they can listen attentively to others, especially the young, as well as to those with experience and styles of leadership outside their normal world-view.
- 078 (c) *Liberating ordained ministers from destructive levels of stress.* Ordained ministers do not carry ultimate responsibility for the church. God himself carries responsibility for it. That responsibility he graciously shares with all his people. Leadership in the church, itself a collaborative ministry of ordained and non-ordained, operates well when it is set within this context and is therefore able to operate within reasonable boundaries (para 053). Ordained ministers have much to learn from many church members who have to cope with inordinate levels of stress in contemporary society.
- 079 Ordained Ministers, Deacons, Deaconesses and Lay Workers, whose primary focus of ministry is within the life of the local church or circuit, need time for their families, other interests and leisure pursuits. Much of the conflict in these areas is in fact shared by other busy and committed Christians in their lay ministries within the church and also by those ministers in connexional and other appointments.
- 080 (d) *All Christians represent Christ.* The church flourishes when all its members, ordained and non-ordained, affirm one another as representatives of Christ and the church to the world and as signs of the presence of Christ in the church. When the strong in the church (who usually include the ordained ministers) defer to and encourage the weak, and when the weak bear their testimony to the strong, the collaborative ministry of the whole church is enriched.

SECTION C: MINISTRY & CHURCH STRUCTURES

C.1 CONTINUITY & CHANGE

- 081 The basic structures which have served Methodism throughout most of its history, focused in the local church and the circuit, will continue into the foreseeable future (SO 600). These structures can be used imaginatively to nurture the ministry of all God's people. At appropriate levels of the church's life, significant adaptations of Methodist Church structures and disciplines may be necessary.
- 082 Church structures can frustrate or encourage individual Christian discipleship. Supportive structures are those which cohere with the insights about ministry, vocation and leadership which are widely subscribed to in the church. Section B attempts to summarise these insights.
- 083 There is no simple way of deducing appropriate church structures from a limited statement about the church and Christian ministry. In practice structures evolve from what may be learned from the Bible, Christian history and current developments and pressures both in the churches and in non-ecclesiastical institutions. In what follows we set forward outlines of what we believe to be the next important stages in the development of Methodist Church structures. We are not offering rigid blueprints to be imposed on the church, but guidelines within which appropriate groups may be able to envisage possibilities for themselves. In the not too distant future we expect that the Conference will receive further recommendations, for which these current proposals will be seen as having prepared the way.

C.2a THE METHODIST DIACONAL ORDER

- 084 At this point in the original report, proposals were made for a Methodist Order for Mission and Ministry (MOMM). As explained in the Preface (para 04), two factors have led us drastically to alter what was envisaged.
- 085 The first is that during the period of the production of the report the Wesley Deaconess Order has reopened to receive both male and female candidates.
- 086 The second is the widespread opposition to the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry which was recorded in the responses. The objections were of various kinds (See Appendix):
- (a) that the operation of the proposed system on a district basis was unsatisfactory;
 - (b) that it would upset the balanced relationship between ministry and laity;
 - (c) that it would create confusion with the Wesley Deaconess Order;
 - (d) that it did not take account of Local Preachers, so that it was not clear how they would relate to the new order, if at all;
 - (e) that the proposals would involve a grouping whose scope was so wide that the variety of workers comprised by it would be unacceptable;
 - (f) that the scheme would create problems of cost;

(g) that it would raise the question ‘Would not every Methodist member feel eligible?’ Hence the proposals for the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry were divisive, as drawing an invidious distinction between first and second class Christians.

087 Of these difficulties, we regarded some as answerable, but the last, especially in view of the strength of the negative reaction on this score, as sufficiently telling to lead us to alternative proposals.

088 Not only will the proposed Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO), as it develops from the Wesley Deaconess Order, be open to men as well as women; it will cover a different range of work. But it must not be thought that the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry is being introduced under another name. The three factors – ordination, life-long commitment and availability for stationing – indicate a parallel with the ordained ministry, from which it will be distinguished by being diaconal rather than presbyteral.

C.2 LAY WORKERS

089 The change in the proposals for the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry affects the provision made in the Report for those lay workers who have hitherto been covered by SO 581. These will not be part of the Methodist Diaconal Order. Such changes as are thought necessary are listed in the Preface [para 04(iii)], and dealt with in new standing orders. It is hoped that such lay workers as those in OASIS or Cliff College evangelists, who do not fall strictly under the categories of SO 581 may be able to relate to and profit from opportunities that are provided for training and fellowship by the proposed committee within the Division of Ministries.

090 In addition to creating specific offices such as those of the minister, the local preacher or the junior church leader to further the ecclesial ministry, the church has also appointed paid workers with training in secular disciplines so that they may add their skill to the total ministry. Social Workers in the National Children’s Home, Youth Workers, as employed by a number of churches, and those who serve in Methodist Homes for the Aged exemplify such specialist workers. We wish to affirm all these kinds of ministry and hope that the church will continue to do so. The variety of training, skill and understanding available through such workers adds to the resources of any leadership team in the church.

091 Standing orders make provision for a local church to employ a full-time youth worker, youth and community worker, or worker with children (SO 618[3]); for a circuit to employ such a worker (SO 581 [11]); and for a district to employ a Youth Officer (SO 462). All such appointments are now made subject to the authorization of the District Policy Committee (SO 438A). Such appointments are commended.

092 Two important factors are noted concerning such appointments. The first is that many have only become possible when large sums of money have been made available to the Church by external bodies who recognize the value of this form of ministry in the community. The availability of this funding frequently tends to determine the location of the worker.

093 The second is that the management and support structures for such full-time workers can be, and often are, used to promote the appointment of part-time paid workers. Such workers are normally employed on a sessional basis, and again they are often externally funded.

C.3 TEAM LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL CHURCH, CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT

094 The recommendations of the original report on Team Leadership have met with a most encouraging response. (See the appendix). The church has captured a vision of the improved leadership which can result from the widened skills and perspectives of the proposed teams. Section B outlined the central role that collaborative understandings of leadership play in our theological reflection upon the church. In summary, the advantages of team leadership, involving ministers and other workers, are these:

- (i) a team leadership more fully represents the diverse insights and concerns of the Christian community;
- (ii) team leadership facilitates a sharing of responsibility, pastoral support, reflection and action;
- (iii) team leadership opens up the consultative and decision-making process to professional skills available among church members and to the insights and aspirations of church members whose experience is complementary to the world view of ministers.

We commend, with eager expectation, the place of the leadership team in local churches, circuits and districts.

095 The purpose of team leadership, set within a collaborative view of the ministry of the whole church, is: to draw out and use well the ministerial gifts of church members and ministers, and, as a by-product, to liberate ordained leaders to enjoy a more relaxed and coherent understanding of their role and the limits of their responsibility.

096 In what follows, we have drawn upon the insights of the report on *Team Ministries* (Agenda, 1967, pp. 540-548) and the accumulated experience of the Team Ministry Committee (now called the Committee for Collaborative Ministries).

097 Issues to be faced in setting up team leadership

There is a need to evolve *well-defined, flexible and self-critical leadership teams at every level of the church's life*. We recognise that models of team leadership cannot be imposed on churches, circuits and districts; many ministers will feel temperamentally ill-equipped for participating in teams, or will be anxious about the significant changes of authority and methods of working which involvement in teams inevitably brings. Some of the structural and practical issues which need to be faced are the following.

098 (a) Circuits have become increasingly sectionalised. At this point our practice and our constitution differ. CPD includes the concept of an ordained minister having pastoral charge of a local church, but there is no constitutional place for

a 'section'. However, a section is a highly significant feature of a minister's self-consciousness. While appointments are technically to circuits, in practice they are defined in terms of a section, where it is usually assumed the minister will be the person in whom alone leadership is focused. The circuit often becomes the backcloth, an administrative convenience, or even an irrelevant encumbrance drawing people's attention from their true interests, rather than the natural unit of belonging and mission – for both ordained ministers and local churches. So deeply ingrained has become the identification between an individual ordained minister and a section that considerable effort is put into estimating equivalent workloads among the different sections of a circuit. On occasions this leads to irrational deployment of a minister's pastoral responsibilities – as when, to balance the number of members in each section, churches which have no geographical relationship with each other are lumped together in a section.

- 099 The alternative picture which team leadership of circuits presents is this: Methodist members have the right of fairly ready access to dependable and skilled pastoral care; they need to know to whom they may turn for help, and when and where. However, there is no necessary reason why the person appointed to lead the ministry of pastoral care in a local church should also be the one who will carry the whole range of leadership functions for that church (fn 11). Rather, the circuit leadership team, incorporating all the ordained ministers appointed to the circuit, carries that wider responsibility corporately. In practice this means that a circuit, having guaranteed pastoral care for its members, will be able to assist ministers to find a balance between the following: concentrated effort in a limited area of work (which will in turn be shaped by an individual's aptitude, skills and experience); and the effectiveness of the team.
- 100 (b) The ecumenical movement has encouraged close working relationships between Methodist ministers and ordained ministers of other denominations. The benefits of this co-operation have been incalculable. *Many Methodist ministers will think it is much more natural and creative to enter into ecumenical leadership teams in a locality than to expend considerable effort in generating team leadership in a Methodist circuit at the expense of ecumenical co-operation.*
- 101 Close collegiality between ministers of different denominations has highlighted a further complexity in the self-understanding of Methodist ministers. The latter have sometimes adopted patterns of relationship with congregations and with their colleagues which have, perhaps unconsciously, imitated those characteristic of other denominations. By and large, the denominations with which closest co-operation has evolved have developed more individualistic perceptions of ordained ministry than were traditional within Methodism. In extreme cases this has led a Methodist minister, given responsibility for a considerable number of churches in a section, to repeat many times over the relationship between a minister and a single congregation which has been prevalent in Anglican and Reformed traditions.
- 102 (c) The development of modes of behaviour and of self-understanding characteristic of the professions has been muted but evident among Methodist ministers. Team leadership calls for more thoroughgoing professional practice

among ministers in a way which incorporates critical reflection upon professionalisation in contemporary society. (See paras 073-074).

103 Basic elements in leadership teams

It is expected that at different levels of the church's life, and in different locations, a large variety of team leadership structures will emerge and evolve. The unity of leadership patterns will be provided by there being common basic elements in most situations. By way of illustration there now follows an outline of some of these fundamental constituents in relation to circuits. It is hoped that *churches, ecumenical groupings and districts as well as circuits may envisage possibilities appropriate to their own situations and aims.*

104 (a) Leadership teams will normally include ministers, deacons, deaconesses, lay workers, circuit stewards and other persons appointed because of their relevant skills.

105 (b) The appointment of ministers to circuit leadership teams will need to take account of:

(i) A significant additional factor in judging the appropriateness of the appointment of a minister to a circuit will be the ability of the prospective new team member and the remaining team-members to work together in the service of the circuit as a whole, and to renegotiate the terms on which they exercise their joint responsibilities.

(ii) Circuit stewards will be *ex officio* members of the circuit leadership team, and in this setting will exercise their role in regard to the invitation of ministers.

(iii) It will be less exceptional for superintendents to be appointed by the Conference upon nomination from among ministers already serving in the circuit. While there may be some circuits where it is, for example, on geographical grounds, desirable for the superintendent to be stationed at a particular centre, there are others where it could be beneficial for the superintendency to be detached from the churches with which it has been long associated.

106 (c) The purpose of the circuit leadership team is to enable the Circuit meeting to fulfil its responsibilities as set out in SO 512. To this end, a statement of purpose, closely imitating the mood of SO 623, will be a valuable asset for leadership teams. Particular functions for the circuit leadership team (under the Circuit meeting) will be:

to provide support, resources and training for local churches and particularly for local church leaders;

to provide resources for the mission of the church at circuit level, by stimulating awareness of the need and contributions to it;

to exercise a ministry of visitation to the local churches (para 054), (fn 13) or to ensure that visitations take place.

107 (d) Team leadership, by its very existence is a structural encouragement to churches to discover the advantages of collaborative ministry in the church as

a whole – releasing gifts among church members, sharing skills, encouraging imaginative tasks, providing support through interdependence, deploying gifts and skills flexibly. It is the task of the local Church Council to identify for the local church its most important ministries at any point in time and to consult with the circuit leadership team how appropriate resources might be found in the local church itself, in neighbouring churches or in the circuit leadership team.

(e) The Chairman of the District is required and expected to use God's gifts and graces as pastor to the ministers, probationers, deacons, deaconesses and lay workers of the district, and to lead or encourage the total ministry of the district in preaching, worship, evangelism, pastoral care, teaching and administration. During the initial stages of new patterns and styles of collaborative team leadership at circuit and local church level the involvement of the Chairman, together with other gifted people, will be a vital step in such developments.

108 **The Diversity of existing ecclesial ministries**

At the same time as Methodism gives formal recognition to different expressions of ordained ministry as well as to the Methodist Diaconal Order and to the work of those now operating under SO 581, it is essential that we should reaffirm the existence and value of a rich variety of ministries and the need to train those who exercise them.

(a) A single corporate act of worship can require the gifts of many trained individuals quite apart from the vital contribution of the congregation itself. In each worshipping community there is a constant demand for the calling and training of flower arrangers, door stewards, communion stewards, choristers, musicians, directors of drama, makers of banners, operators of audio-visual equipment, leaders of intercessions and readers of the Scriptures, as well as local preachers and the duty church stewards.

(b) The building up of the local Christian community requires the calling and training of leaders and workers with young people's clubs, fellowships and organizations; leaders of children's and young people's groups, fellowships for all ages, clubs for the house-bound and elderly people, besides class-leaders and pastoral visitors (with a new appraisal of their responsibilities) and teachers in Junior Church.

(c) Local church life can be transformed by the pastoral and administrative skills of committee secretaries, caretakers, property stewards, hosts and hostesses, stall-holders, caterers and treasurers.

C.4. DEVELOPMENTS IN ORDAINED MINISTRY

109 Among ordained ministers there is a wide diversity of understanding of the nature and functions of their ministry. In recent decades ministers, attempting faithfully and imaginatively to respond to their calling and to the complexities of contemporary society, have pressed for more flexible patterns of deployment for the ordained ministry. In reviewing these processes, sufficient basic common understandings and adequate minimum, flexible structures must be provided to guard the principle that Methodist ministers belong to one ministry (para 24).

110 Appropriate structures need to be developed to enable the diverse components of the ordained ministry to enrich one another, to foster mutual awareness, support and identity.

111 Structures cannot guarantee to create a sense of mutual belonging among ministers. Personal qualities of trust, understanding, respect and co-operation are called for. Ordained ministers have not always found this easy, especially when perceptions about priorities have differed sharply.

112 **Varied forms of ordained ministry**

Ordained ministry is an ecclesial ministry (see B.3, note 1). One way of understanding the diversity of forms of ordained ministry is to identify the primary focus of the ecclesial ministry exercised by an individual ordained minister. For example,

- (a) The itinerant minister works primarily within, for, and from the churches in a circuit.
- (b) Some ministers are called to work primarily at District or Connexional level, in a variety of ways (e.g. President and Secretary of Conference, Divisional Secretaries, College Tutors, District Chairmen).
- (c) A few ministers are seconded to other denominations or ecumenical agencies in ministries whose primary focus is comparable with the range of possibilities covered by (a) and (b).
- (d) A considerable number of ministers pursue their ministry primarily in a secular context, either in a particular institution or in a sector of contemporary secular life. (See further C.4.1 below).

113 Within these broad categories there are many variations, e.g. a minister who works part time in a circuit and part time in a connexional job. We wish to develop further the diversity of ways in which ordained ministry may be exercised by commending Local Ordained Ministry (See C.4.2 below) (fn 15).

114 **Appointment, Station and Residence**

Traditionally ‘appointment’ and ‘station’ were interchangeable terms for Methodist ordained ministers, and both were linked with residence. This remains the case for most circuit appointments. However, to cope with the increasing diversity of forms of the one ordained ministry, it may be helpful to distinguish appointment and station as follows.

115 An ordained minister’s *appointment* identifies the primary location of his or her ecclesial ordained ministry; the *station* indicates the context in which an individual minister may find structured pastoral support within the church and accountability to the church at large for his or her ministry.

116 In the case of ministers with district or connexional appointments, appointment and station remain interchangeable terms but are separated from residence. In the case of ministers in other appointments, appointment and station are

clearly distinguished. Similarly, ordained ministers without appointment nevertheless have a station linked to residence.

C.4.1 Ministers in Sector Appointments and Other Appointments

117 The category of ministers in other appointments now includes all ordained ministers, who, with the permission of the church or at the behest of the church, work whole time in an institution or context outside the gift of the Methodist Church. This category replaced 'Sector Ministry', which in 1969 had itself replaced 'Permission to serve external organizations'. The present category is arguably too broad and imprecise. We recommend that the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments continue to be responsible for Ministers without Appointment, and for two further categories of ordained ministers: (i) Ministers in the Sectors and (ii) Ministers who serve other denominations or ecumenical agencies.

118 The ministry of the people of God derives its nature and purpose from the life and work of Christ, and the kingdom he came to proclaim and inaugurate. All ministry is derived from Christ and the church, and is exercised for the sake of the kingdom. In response to the changing nature of the contemporary world, God calls his people to exercise their distinctive and diverse ministries to the full. Thus Ministers in the Sectors, like all other ordained ministers, represent and focus both the ministry of Christ and the ministry of the whole church: like all ordained ministers, Ministers in Sector Appointments seek to encourage and train Christians so that they fulfil their calling in their places of work. Methodism must continue to train its people in the art of effective and sensitive witness in their daily occupation. Ministers in Sector Appointments share a particular responsibility for this task.

119 Ministers in the Sectors and in other appointments perceive the area of their daily work as the primary place in which they exercise their calling. They work alongside Christians of all denominations, learning from them, enabling them and stimulating them to discern the shape and form of individual and corporate Christian presence and witness in their place of work. They also work alongside men and women who own no allegiance to any Christian church. A Methodist minister, appointed to work in a secular setting is a sign to the church of the urgent need to work towards collaboration between all ministries across denominational boundaries, and towards the emergence of one church renewed for mission.

120 The development of Ministers in Sector Appointments within Methodism has been complemented by the growth of similar forms of ordained ministry in other denominations (for example, work-focused non-stipendiary ministry in the Church of England). Methodist Ministers in Sector Appointments seek to co-operate and share their insights and resources with sector ministers of whatever title, in other churches.

121 Ministry in the Sectors and Circuit-based Ministry

There is one ordained ministry. Those who are based in the circuits, together with all other Methodist ministers, participate in it equally, and together constitute its unity. The prompting of the Holy Spirit towards ordination is acknowledged and affirmed by the church for ministers in secular employment

as it is for those working in circuits. All ordained ministers are alike required to share in a Synod service of rededication, which at present incorporates the Resolutions on Pastoral work (CPD p418). Resolution 6 reads: ‘We resolve afresh to seek every opportunity to minister in Christ’s name to those who work in industry, local government, and other sectors of the life of the community’ (CPD p573). By and large, circuit ministers fulfil this obligation by pastoral conversation in domestic and local settings with lay people involved in various sectors, and by local chaplaincies. Ministers in secular appointments exercise the same ministry from within one of the distinct sectors of modern life. Thus ordained ministers (a) in circuit appointments, (b) in sector appointments, and (c) in other appointments complement one another, so that co-operatively they may seek every opportunity of furthering the ministry of the whole people of God in and through their daily work.

- 122 The present Standing Orders (Section 74) address the situation where an ordained minister takes the initiative in applying for an appointment within a sector of contemporary society. Such appointments are integral to the mission of the church, and serve (among other objectives) to support the laity exercising their calling in such sectors. The Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments should take opportunities to invite appropriately qualified men and women to apply for appointments in secular institutions and contexts, as well as encouraging suitable candidates who take the initiative themselves to explore such possibilities. This task should be performed with an awareness of key contemporary issues.
- 123 Ministers in Sector Appointments are accountable to, and should be supported by their employers, and also by the local church from whom they should receive prayerful encouragement. In the case of the church, there must be a two-way process of mutual responsibility and support. This needs clear and constant recognition and great care by all concerned.
- 124 Each Minister in a Sector Appointment will continue to be stationed. Special attention should be given by District Chairmen, Superintendents and local leadership teams when a Minister in a Sector Appointment or in Another Appointment is entered in the stations. Such a person’s ecclesial ministry needs constant and wide affirmation within the circuit. Ministers in the Sector Appointments should be given adequate opportunities (within the demands of their daily work) to preside at the Lord’s Supper, to preach in the local circuit regularly and to be an integral part of a particular congregation.
- 125 The original report suggested the possibility of some Ministers in Sector Appointments being placed in a station on a District list (rather than a circuit station, as at present). We have concluded that this issue should be referred to the group proposed in para 127, below.
- 126 In all cases it should be the responsibility of the District Chairman, in consultation with the Ministers in Sector Appointments and the Circuit Superintendents, to ensure that appropriate structures for mutual support and accountability are established. Care should be taken to incorporate appropriate lay people and circuit ministers in the supportive structures.

127 It is recommended that there be instituted a representative group of District Chairmen and Ministers in Sector Appointments to draw up further guidelines concerned with mutual accountability and support. This group should be appointed by the Division of Ministries and convened by the Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments. This group should consider the possibility of establishing, with Divisional involvement, an annual meeting of all ministers in Sector Appointments. The group should report to Conference through the Board of the Division of Ministries.

C.4.2. Ministers in Local Appointments

128 The concept of a local (that is, a non-stipendiary and non-itinerant) ordained ministry has been discussed by the Conference on a number of occasions, most notably in 1977 and 1978. The *formal definition* provided in the 1978 Report was:

Ministers in local appointments, like all ministers, believe themselves called of God to the ordained ministry. This call the church tests and recognizes. They are trained for that ministry so that they are competent to exercise it. Like all ordinands, upon the recommendation of their District Synod, they are received into full connexion by the Conference and ordained. They are leaders of worship, preachers of the Gospel, pastors within and outside the life of the Church, enablers and administrators. They are accountable to the Conference, and stationed in circuits by its authority. Their conditions of service and their relationship to the Conference are different from those of stipendiary ministers in that they are not entitled to a manse, stipend or pension, but only to agreed expenses incurred in the course of their circuit duties, and they are not subject to itinerancy.

129 It is unclear to what degree, if any, the Conference can be said to have accepted this concept in principle (fn 17). Conference is invited to look freshly at its implications in the light of Section B of this report. The discussion of ministry, vocation and leadership in Section B provides a framework of thought which makes possible the notion of a local ordained ministry, alongside of and working co-operatively with the stipendiary, itinerant ordained ministry.

130 *The arguments in favour* of Ministers in Local Appointments are twofold.

(a) What section B permits in our conception of ordained ministry:

(i) Paras 038, 039 imply that ordained ministry is not essentially whole-time or stipendiary.

131 (ii) Para 079 refers to the balance of ecclesial and secular vocations in the total discipleship of a stipendiary, itinerant ordained minister. The relative weight given to ecclesial and secular vocations has for many years varied from one minister to another. This has also been true for many other church members. We therefore conclude that there will be some who, throughout their ordained ministry or for a portion of their ordained ministry, will experience a call to work in paid, full-time (or part-time) secular employment and exercise their ecclesial ministry as ordained persons on a non-stipendiary and part-time basis in a circuit. (In occasional circumstances some stipend

appropriate to part-time work might be paid in addition to expenses). Thus the difference between a Minister in a Local Appointment and an Itinerant Minister of the traditional type is not a difference in kind, but a difference of *balance* in the outworking of their faith and obedience *between ecclesial and secular vocations*.

- 132 (b) Emphases in section B which can be given clear institutional expression through local ordained ministry.

Two emphases are noteworthy here: the stress on collaborative styles of ministry; and the encouragement to all Christians to discern their secular vocation as a significant focus of their discipleship.

- 133 (i) Traditionally the Methodist minister in rural and many urban areas was available to any particular church in his circuit or section only for limited periods on specific days. Frequently he acted almost as a chaplain, who visited some of the churches from time to time and worked intensively in the period available in areas of ministry considered to be of greatest importance, leaving the effective oversight of the churches between his visits to local leaders. During the twentieth century, the rapid improvement in communications and ease of travel have dramatically affected the relationships between ministers and congregations in all social settings. Sometimes this has led to undue dependence upon and unrealistic expectations of ministers, and to excessive stress in the life-style of ordained persons. A Minister in a Local Appointment will be available only within restricted periods of time for the duties of ordained ministry. This fact will help church members and ministers to discern the importance of working together and sharing responsibility for the church's well-being. It is not envisaged that a circuit will be staffed wholly by Ministers in Local Appointments, so there is no danger of normal expectations about pastoral support in emergencies being undermined. However, a local church, assessing in consultation with the circuit its resources of ministry and its needs and priorities, will have to ask: How can we best use this minister in this local appointment?

- 134 (ii) This proposal will also enrich the ministry of the whole people of God by the Minister in a Local Appointment displaying in his or her own life serious Christian obedience in a secular as well as ecclesiastical setting. This will facilitate church members identifying more readily with their minister, and in turn will help ministers to empathise more deeply with the needs and diverse claims upon time and energy experienced by Christian people endeavouring to live their lives well in both church and society.

135 **Ministry in Local Appointments builds on the experience of some circuits**

In practice the advent of Ministers in Local Appointments will not cause undue disruption in the ministry of leadership offered to circuits and churches. There is already in Methodism experience of ordained ministers being available to churches only part-time, and within restricted periods. We instance: supernumerary ministers doing part-time work in circuits; some part-time circuit appointments (the other part of an ordained minister's time being devoted to, say, a connexional job); and the limited voluntary ecclesial ministry sometimes offered by Ministers without appointment, and by Ministers in other appointments.

136 **Earlier unease about Ministers in Local Appointments**

When the issue of Ministers in Local Appointments has been discussed previously by the Conference, many have expressed unease at any deviation from the notion of an ordained minister being available whole-time for his or her work. We suspect the springs of this unease are fourfold: the importance of whole-timeness as a sign of a profound commitment to Christ; the parity of all presbyters; the effects on congregation and minister of a near-permanent relationship; and the future of itinerancy. Our comments on these themes are as follows.

- 137 (i) It is true that part of the witness of ministers is to be a sign to the church of the depth and of the unconditional character of commitment to Christ that baptism lays upon every Christian. That testimony is shared with many others in the church who are not ordained. However, the quality of such witness in an ordained person is expressed in a life lived 'in every part' in Christ-like love and service, and is not confined to an ordained person's ecclesial ministry. It therefore becomes of less significance whether an ordained ministry is whole-time or part-time in the service of the church.
- 138 (ii) Ordained ministry in the Methodist Church has already experience of diverse structures (varied forms of initial training; Ministers in other appointments; Ministers without appointment). The advent of Ministers in Local Appointments need not threaten the unity of the ordained ministry as a whole. Until Methodism has experience of incorporating such ministers into its polity, we suggest that it is essential that the conditions and process of candidature for such ministry shall be identical to those for itinerant ministry; and that the initial training for Ministers in Local Appointments shall take place within one of the patterns recognised for the training of itinerant ministry. This will ensure interchangeability between local and itinerant ministers, a flexibility which will be to the advantage of the church and of ministers themselves. Such interchangeability emphasizes what is in any case true, that the validity of the ordination of a local ordained minister is not confined to a limited geographical area; a Minister in a Local Appointment shares with all other presbyters ordination into the church of God.
- 139 From the point of view of the ordained minister, his or her sense of participating in the body of ordained ministers will be enhanced by a developing self-understanding as a professional person. A minister's identity, confidence and competence can be secured through appropriate training, probation and acceptance within the discipline and ethos of the corporate body of ordained ministers. Continued recognition and 'status' are compatible, as in other professions with time off from the practice of the profession and with part-time or unpaid, voluntary practice of the profession.
- 140 (iii) Many congregations will fear that if they are served by a Minister in a Local Appointment who is not subject to itinerancy, problems may arise: if relationships between ordained minister and congregation become difficult, or if an ordained minister becomes so settled in a church that he or she loses the capacity to challenge a congregation to new understandings of the gospel or new ways of exercising its ministry, how can the relationship be significantly changed or concluded? A number of factors may help in such situations:

no congregation or Minister in a Local Appointment will exist in isolation from other churches or other ordained ministers in the circuit, and this wider context may help towards reconciliation, mutual understanding, or redeployment of pastoral oversight;

we believe that a scheme for the exercise of such a ministry, including a job description, will provide a useful contribution to agreed expectations and responsibilities for both the Minister in a Local Appointment and for the church; the job description may include an initial term of service prior to a thorough review of the working arrangements;

in the event of a reduction in circuit staff, the District Chairman, Superintendent and the circuit leadership team must be careful not to off-load the extra work on to a Minister in a Local Appointment whose workload has already been determined;

an increasing confidence in a ministry of visitation, a periodic critical evaluation of the relationship between a church and a Minister in a Local Appointment, and a careful programme of further training appropriate for Ministers in Local Appointments will enhance the capacity for personal growth and sensitivity.

141 There may be a number of situations where it will be necessary to terminate the engagement of Ministers in Local Appointments, who might then become Ministers without Appointment. However, long before such action would become necessary, congregations and ministers will be called upon to deepen those qualities of trust, patience, honesty and generosity which underlie all attempt to build community. It is essential that such qualities underlie the whole development of Ministers in Local Appointments.

142 (iv) We expect that in the immediate future, Ministers in Local Appointments will constitute a small proportion of the whole. Problems relating to the itinerant principle may, in due course, need to be considered by Conference upon advice tendered by the Stationing Committee.

143-145

C.4.3 Some consequences of the above proposals

C.4.4 Ministers without Appointment

Matters dealt with under these headings in the original Report are now covered in the proposed new standing orders. But one further consequence emerged in preparing the legislation for Ministers in Local Appointments. At present, the calculation of each circuit's lay representation to the Synod is based upon the number of ministers in the full work and probationers appointed to that circuit [SO 410 (1) (v)]. However, we believe that, regardless of our proposals for the introduction of this form of ministry, the time has come for a fresh look at whether this basis of representation is still appropriate in view of the diversities of ministry already existing, and we therefore bring forward Resolution 6 d) below.

C.4.5 Episcopacy

- 146 The Methodist Church has been enriched by many forms of ‘episcopate’ (oversight). ‘This oversight is exercised both corporately and individually. It is exercised corporately, for example, by Conference, Synods, Circuit Meetings, Pastoral Committees and individually by the President, Chairmen, Superintendents, Ministers, Class Leaders’ (*Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, Section C.3). This report summarises and comments on this Methodist practice in paras 050-064, and provides its theological basis in paras 041-048.
- 147 We judge that the time is not right for Methodism to introduce the historic episcopate into its system, for the following reasons.
- (a) Sections C.2-4 of this report propose far-reaching changes in the structure of the Methodist Church. Their detailed implementation will absorb energy and imagination, if Conference approves them in principle. Concentrated application of resources to secure these changes in such a way as to win general approval throughout the church is a high priority for the Methodist Church as it pursues its mission in contemporary society.
 - (b) Any move unilaterally to take the historic episcopate into our system would at present be damagingly divisive within Methodism.
 - (c) we perceive the ecumenical situation to be uncertain and changing, so that the ecumenical implications of any such step would be unclear.
- 148 We recommend that if and when the church judges it right to incorporate the historic episcopate into its polity, it will espouse an understanding of episcopacy which coheres with the theology of leadership in Section B of this report, the recommendations of the report *Episcopacy in the Methodist Church*, and the guidance given in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (‘Ministry’, paras 20-25).

C.4.6 Nomenclature

- 149 Questions of this nature are dealt with elsewhere, particularly in the Preface (05 [i]).

Notes

1. (B.3) We prefer ‘ecclesial’ to ‘ecclesiastical’ because the latter tends to carry with it a picture of the church as a settled, rather inward-looking and bureaucratic institution. An ‘ecclesial’ ministry, properly understood, is a fluid concept, which refers to a wide range of imaginative forms of service which clarify and strengthen the Christian identity of the church as a human community and which furthers the church’s outreach into every facet of the world’s life.
2. (041) Omitted.
3. (047) Church leaders are referred to as elders in the NT as follows: Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:4, 6, 22, 16:4, 20:17, 21:18; I Tim. 5:17-19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; II John 1.

4. (059) The exception to this might be the ministry of the sacraments. In the Deed of Union it is explicitly declared that no-one has an exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. Discussion of sacraments takes place at a different point in the Deed of Union, and no attempt is made to discuss whether or not ordained persons have an exclusive title to preside over the sacraments. Our practice and discipline are summarised in para 057.
 5. (063) Thus the Conference of 1980 adopted the proposal of the President's Council (Agenda pp 8-9) that a lay person may be appointed as a General Secretary of a Division. No conditions were set forward in the report, nor in SO 302, regarding the experience or the status of any candidate for such an appointment.
 6. (068) See Note 4 and para 059.
 7. (075) On the contribution of women to the ministry, see 009.
- 8-10 (C.2, 084, 085) Omitted.
11. (099) Omitted.
 12. (104) Omitted.
 13. (106) SO 525[1] is now amended to clarify this function.
 14. (108) This paragraph has been altered, so that the footnote no longer refers. It mentioned the need for training in the local church particularly in the area of pastoral care. We understand that the Pastoral Care Project being promoted within the Division of Ministries is concerned with this matter, along with others. In due course, Conference may need to respond to particular proposals from the Division.
 15. (113) Omitted.
 16. (122) This paragraph has been altered, so that the footnote no longer refers. But account has been taken of its proposal to alter the title of SO 745 from 'Return' to 'Transfer to appointment within the control of the church'.
 17. (129) The representative Session of the 1977 Conference adopted Notice of Motion 15 (Daily Record, p47) which included the clause 'Conference . . . adopts the general principle of auxiliary ministry'. Previously the Ministerial Session had declined to adopt the report presented by the Division of Ministries on Auxiliary Ministries, while the Representative Session had adopted it by a narrow majority. The 1978 Report, 'Ministers in Local Appointments' was not adopted by the Conference.
 18. (130) These points have already been accepted by the Conference in adopting the 1960 and 1974 reports on Ordination (Ordination in the Methodist Church [1960] p8; Ordination [1974] para 25).
 19. (131) Now incorporated in the text.

**APPENDIX
ANALYSIS OF RESPONSE**

1. Reaction to main proposals

Table of various categories of respondents, indicating whether they were for, or against the Report's proposals, or felt some area of the proposals was problematic

		A	B	C	D	E	
MOMM	For	–	1	8	–	3	A. Individuals 10
	Against	3	5	22	5	6	B. Churches 10
	Problem	2	3	27	4	2	C. Circuits 77
MLA	For	1	2	16	2	2	D. Districts 12
	Against	3	3	16	1	–	E. Groups 14
	Problem	1	3	37	3	2	TOTAL 123
MSA	For	–	–	6	–	2	MOMM: Methodist Order of Mission & Ministry
	Against	2	1	3	–	–	MLA: Ministers in Local Appointments
	Problem	1	3	15	2	2	MSA: Ministers in Sector Appointments
Team	For	1	4	24	4	3	Team: Proposals for collaborative ministry
	Against	–	–	2	–	–	
	Problem	–	–	7	–	–	

**2. General reaction to the Report
Table showing main areas of response**

	A	B	C	D	E	
(i)	4	8	38	7	4	(i) Agree with main thrust of the Report
(ii)	1	4	27	7	1	(ii) Bad style & layout; hard to understand
(iii)	3	3	16	6	1	(iii) Undue concentration on ordained or limited areas of ministry
(iv)	–	–	9	2	1	(iv) Inadequate attention to ecumenical issues
(v)	1	–	1	–	–	(v) Report regarded as generally irrelevant

3. Problems with the Methodist Order of Mission and Ministry

	A	B	C	D	E	
Total	2	3	27	4	2	A, B, C, D, E: As above
(i)	–	–	4	1	–	(i) Unsatisfactory interface with ordained ministry
(ii)	2	2	15	3	3	(ii) Hierarchical, divisive
(iii)	–	2	10	–	–	(iii) District base thought unsatisfactory
(iv)	–	–	9	3	2	(iv) Confusion with the Wesley Deaconess Order feared
(v)	–	–	3	–	–	(v) Financial concern
(vi)	1	–	11	–	–	(vi) Local Preachers left unaccounted for
(vii)	–	–	5	1	–	(vii) Thought to cover too diverse an area of ministry

**4. Problems with Ministry in Local Appointments,
called in the Report 'Local Ordained Ministry'**

	A	B	C	D	E	A, B, C, D, E: As above
Total	1	3	37	3	2	(i) Uneasily suspended between ordained ministry and laity
(i)	1	2	20	-	1	(ii) Problems envisaged in terminating appointment
(ii)	-	1	13	1	-	(iii) Stress foreseen at time of training
(iii)	-	-	10	-	-	(iv) Problem of reconciling demands of secular employment with urgent calls of ministry
(iv)	-	2	9	-	-	(v) Ministerial status of one who moves secular employment
(v)	-	-	4	1	-	(vi) Maximum offers likely from places of minimum need
(vi)	-	-	6	-	-	(vii) Danger of inhibiting proper use of lay people
(vii)	-	-	4	2	-	See Preface pp 5-6

5. Problems of Ministry in Sector Appointments

	A	B	C	D	E	A, B, C, D, E: As above
Total	1	3	15	2	2	(i) Sector appointments seen as lay employment
(i)	1	2	10	1	-	(ii) Opposed to immediate stationing in the Sectors
(ii)	-	-	7	-	1	(iii) No distinction between these and Local Appointments
(iii)	-	1	3	-	-	(iv) Anxiety about pastoral care of those in such posts
(iv)	-	-	1	-	-	

6. Problems with Team Ministry

TOTAL	7	CIRCUITS
Concern about creating a new kind of hierarchy by singling out some lay people for special leadership roles		3
Concern about upsetting the leadership balance in circuit or section		5

Notes

1. Twelve districts responded (38%) and seventy-seven circuits (11%).
2. Where problems were indicated, some mentioned more than one, others none at all.

RESOLUTION 1

The Conference adopts the Commission's replies to the responses made by circuits, districts, other groups and individuals to the original Report.

RESOLUTION 2

The Conference adopts those parts of the Report which affirm the wide range of existing lay ministries in the church and the world and encourages their development.

RESOLUTION 3

- a) The Conference adopts the proposals relating to *Lay Workers* [para 04 (iii); 089-093].
- b) The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:

I. Add to Section 33 as a new Standing Order 339:

339 Lay Workers

- (1) The Board shall appoint as one of its committees the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers, which shall have general responsibility for all matters relating to the development, training and support of lay workers employed under the provisions of Standing Order 405 or 581.
- (2) The Committee shall consist of:
 - (i) the General Secretary of the Division and a treasurer of the Division;
 - (ii) two representatives of the Home Mission Division;
 - (iii) one representative of the Division of Education and Youth;
 - (iv) the secretary of the committee;
 - (v) up to fifteen other persons, including two persons currently employed as lay workers under Standing Order 405 or 581.
- (3) For the purposes of discharging its responsibilities the Committee shall:
 - (i) develop and co-ordinate the provision of training for lay workers and monitor its use and effectiveness;
 - (ii) ensure the provision of pastoral support and assistance to lay workers and develop the opportunities for mutual support of lay workers at every level of church life including the convening of regional and connexional meetings of all such workers;
 - (iii) offer these opportunities for training and support to such persons not employed under Standing Order 405 or 581 as may wish to benefit from them;
 - (iv) promote interest in the ministry of lay workers and encourage the development and support of new forms of lay ministry, particularly those directed towards the mission of the church;
 - (v) provide information and advice to Districts and Circuits and to persons considering the possibility of offering service in this area, and establish, where appropriate, a link between the two;
 - (vi) report its judgment upon schemes for proposed appointments submitted under Standing Order 405 or 581;
 - (vii) receive and make comments upon annual reports from Synods upon the operation of schemes under those Standing Orders;

- (viii) ensure, so far as local circumstances permit, some parity of treatment between lay workers.

II. Add to section 40 as a new Standing Order 405:

405 Lay Workers

(1) If it is desired to employ a lay person in pastoral, evangelistic or administrative work in a District, otherwise than as a youth officer, in circumstances in which Standing Order 581 would apply to a comparable circuit appointment, a scheme shall be prepared by the district Policy Committee dealing with the matters specified in clauses (2) and (3) of that Standing Order and the procedure of clauses (3) to (7) and (9) of that Standing Order shall be followed.

(2) Any person appointed under this Standing Order shall act under the direction and pastoral care of the Chairman.

III. Standing Order 581: Amendments

1. Rename the Standing Order: 'Lay Workers'.
2. In **clause (1)** after 'evangelistic work' insert ', or in administrative work related to furthering and co-ordinating the mission of the Church,'.
3. For the first line of **clause (2)** substitute:
'Subject to clause (5B) below the Circuit Meeting shall in every such case prepare a scheme'
and at the end, delete
'and with the amount of remuneration, if any'.
4. At the end of **clause (3)** add
(viii) that adequate financial arrangements have been made for the support of the worker.
5. Add as a new **clause (3A)**:
(3A) The sub-committee, after considering the scheme, shall submit it, with its comments, to the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers for its judgment.
6. For the existing **clause 4**, substitute as **clauses (4) and (4A)**:
(4) If in the light of its own consideration and the judgment of the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers the sub-committee thinks it desirable to do so, it shall refer the scheme back to its promoters for further consideration; if the scheme is then submitted in substantially modified form, it shall be re-submitted to the Advisory Committee for its further judgment.

(4A) In all cases the sub-committee, having taken into account the judgment and, if any, the further judgment of the Advisory Committee, shall make its recommendation to the Synod through the district Policy Committee and if the scheme is adopted by the Synod it shall be implemented. In each case the decision of the Synod shall be reported to the Advisory Committee.

7. In **clause 5** after 'sub-committee' insert
' , after obtaining the judgment thereon of the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers,'.
8. Add as a new **clause (5B)**:
(5B) Where it is more appropriate to do so the scheme may be submitted for approval in principle to the district sub-committee and the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers before a name is proposed for appointment. Where this is done, the details of the person proposed for appointment shall later be submitted to the sub-committee which shall, after consultation with the Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Lay Workers, report to the Synod through the district Policy Committee. Except where clause (5) above applies, the scheme shall be implemented only after the Synod has approved these details.
9. In **clause (6)** in the first line for 'Home Mission Division board' substitute 'Advisory Committee on Lay Workers',
and delete everything after the semi-colon.

IV. Consequential Amendments

1. In **Standing Order 330 (2)** after '335' insert 'and 337 to 339'.
2. In **Standing Order 410 (1) (xiv)** add at the end:
' , and all lay workers employed in the District under Standing Order 405'.
3. In **Standing Order 510 (1)** for head (vii) substitute:
'(vii) any full-time youth worker, youth and community worker or worker with children, and any lay worker appointed under Standing Order 581, who in either case is a member in the Circuit and employed by the Circuit Meeting;'.
4. In **Standing Order 610 (1) (iv)** delete 'pastoral' before 'worker'.
5. In **Standing Order 967 (2) (ii)** before '462' insert '405,'

V. Agenda amendments

District Policy committee Meeting I. (C.P.D. p. 420)

- Question 5B: delete 'by Circuit meetings';
for 'in pastoral or evangelistic work' substitute 'under Standing Order 405 or 581';
for 'Home Mission Division' substitute 'Advisory Committee on Lay Workers'.

Meeting II. (C.P.D. p. 424/1)

- Question 34B: delete 'by Circuit Meetings';
for 'in pastoral or evangelistic work' substitute 'under Standing Order 405 or 581';

for 'Home Mission Division' and 'Home Mission board'
substitute in each case 'Advisory Committee on Lay
Workers'.

RESOLUTION 4

- a) The Conference adopts the proposals relating to *collaborative ministry*, including the ministry of visitation, (para 05 (I); 094-107) and encourages districts, circuits and local churches to consider how such forms of ministry might be developed in their own particular situations.
- b) The Conference amends Standing Orders, Agendas and Guidance as to Invitations as follows:

I. Collaborative Ministry

Circuits

1. In **Standing Order 512** add a new **clause (3)**:
The meeting shall, where appropriate, encourage the circuit stewards to build a circuit leadership team to be appointed by the meeting to assist it to fulfil its responsibilities under this Standing Order. This team, where constituted, should include the ministers appointed to the Circuit, the circuit stewards and such other persons as are thought appropriate and should meet reasonably frequently at a time convenient for all.
2. **Circuit meeting Agenda, March** (C.P.D. p. 433):
In question 7, add '(c) Do we decide to appoint a circuit leadership team?'
In question 13, add '(i) members of the circuit leadership team (if constituted)'.
3. **Guidance as to Invitations** (C.P.D. p. 575ff):
Section B, first paragraph: in line 7, after 'stewards' insert '(and other members of leadership teams, where constituted)';

(1)(b)(ii); insert before the semi-colon, ', in conjunction with the circuit leadership team, where this has been constituted';

Section C(2)(b): after 'review' insert ', in conjunction with the circuit leadership team where this has been constituted,'.

Local Church

1. In **Standing Order 623**: add at the end:
'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.'
2. Church council Agenda (C.P.D. p.449):
In question 8 add '(d) Do we wish to appoint persons to work with the minister and church stewards as a team in providing leadership in our church?'
In question 11(a) add '(xvi) members of the church leadership team (if constituted)'.

II. The Ministry of Visitation

1. Insert after Standing Order 521:

Standing Order 521A Visitation (1) The Superintendent shall also visit all the Local Churches in the Circuit to provide encouragement, challenge and support.

(2) the Superintendent is further encouraged to gather, in conjunction with the Circuit Meeting, a group of people, who, in the name of the Circuit, may visit a Local Church which needs help in fulfilling its ministry in any way more effectively.

2. **Circuit Meeting Agenda, March (C.P.D. p.433):**

Insert **Question 6A:**

'Is there any Local Church which needs the help of the Circuit in fulfilling its ministry more effectively? If so, whom do we appoint to visit that church?'

III. Other items

1. In the title of **Standing Order 454**, delete 'Lay'.

RESOLUTION 5

- a) The Conference adopts the proposals relating to **ministers in sector and other appointments** (para 05(iii); 117-127)
- b) The Conference directs the Division of Ministries to establish the representative group referred to in paragraph 127, to carry out the tasks referred to in that paragraph and paragraph 125;
- c) The Conference amends Standing Orders and Agendas as follows:

I. Definitions

1. **Standing Order 005.** Add a new **item (iiiA):** 'ministers in sector appointments' means ministers in appointments within the scope of Standing Order 740(1).

In **item (iv)**, for 'Section 74' substitute 'Standing Order 740 (2)'.
In **item (v)**, before 'other appointments' insert 'sector or'.

2. Substitute a new Standing Order 740:

740 Ministry in sector and other appointments.

(1) Ministry in sector appointments includes full-time ministries in such areas of community life as education, industry and the social services and ministries exercised in organisations not directly controlled by the Methodist Church or by any other denominational or ecumenical body or agency.

(2) Ministry in other appointments includes full-time ministries exercised in any denominational or ecumenical body or agency.

(3) Appointments to the principalships and chaplaincies of Methodist schools and colleges and the National Children's Home and chaplaincies to Industrial Missions are not within the scope of this Section.

II. Other principal changes

1. Standing Order 335:

Rename the Standing Order 'Ministry in Sector and Other Appointments'.

In **clause (2)** before 'other appointments' insert 'sector or'.

In **clause (3)** add at the end of subclause (i) 'and in ecumenical agencies, and, where appropriate, encourage ministers with suitable qualifications to consider applying for such appointments';

in subclauses (iii) and (iv) before 'other appointments' insert 'sector or'.

2. Standing Order 705

Add a new clause (5)

If the committee recommends any candidate who wishes to serve, after training, as a minister in sector or other appointments, a reasoned case for the recommendation shall be brought to the Conference.

(Ministerial Session)

III. Consequential amendments

1. In **Standing Order 741 (1)** for 'such an appointment' substitute 'an appointment within clause (1) or (2) of Standing Order 740'.
2. Rename **Standing Order 745** 'Transfer to Appointments within the control of the Church'
3. For 'Section 74' substitute 'Standing Order 740' in the following Standing Orders: **714(3); 767(6); 788(1)**.
4. Insert 'sector and' before 'other appointments' in the following Standing Orders: **250(1)(ii); 252; 730(8)**; and in the title of **Section 74**.
5. Insert 'sector or' before 'other appointments' in the following Standing Orders: **365(3)(a) and (13); 522(1); 562(3); 606(5); 737(1); 737(2)(a); 752(1)**; and in **Circuit Meeting Agenda (September)** (C.P.D. p.431) question 10(a).

RESOLUTION 6

- a) The Conference adopts the general principle of **ministry in local appointments** as set out in the body of the Report (para 05(ii); 128-142) and in the proposed legislation below:
- b) The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:
In section 74, insert a new **Standing Order 746(1)**:
'There shall be a category of ministers in local appointments, who will not be required to be itinerant and will not normally be provided with allowances or accommodation by the Church.';
- c) The Conference directs the Division of Ministries to present the remainder of the proposed legislation, in its present form or with revisions, to the appropriate sessions of the Conference of 1989 for adoption, subject to the due confirmation of the amendment contained in resolution b) above;

- d) The Conference directs the General Purposes Committee to consider the basis upon which the circuit lay representation to the Synod is calculated under Standing Order 410(1)(v) and any alternative bases which might be more appropriate, and to bring recommendations thereon to the Conference of 1989.

Proposed amendments to Standing Orders and Agendas (see (a) and (c) in RESOLUTION 6 above.

I. Changes in definition section:

- S.O.005. a) In item (ii) after 'Standing Order' insert '746(8)'.
b) Add a new item (x):
'ministers in local appointments' means ministers appointed to Circuits under the provisions of clauses (6) and (7) of Standing Order 746.

II. New principal Standing order: 746 Ministers in Local Appointments

- (1) There shall be a category of ministers in local appointments, who will not be required to be itinerant and will not normally be provided with allowances or accommodation by the Church.
- (2) A candidate for the ministry in this category shall meet the requirements of Standing Order 700 clauses (1) to (5). Standing Order 700(7) shall also apply but not Standing Order 700(6). In addition, such a candidate will be expected to show such maturity and flexibility as to be able to exercise this ministry and also do justice to his or her secular employment and family commitments. Such a candidate shall normally be at least 30 years old.
- (3) Before nomination the Superintendent shall discuss with such a candidate the possibility of exercising his or her ministry in the Circuit, both at work and in the church; such discussions shall, wherever possible, involve the Circuit Stewards and other appropriate Circuit leaders. Should there be no suitable opportunity there, the Superintendent shall consult with the Chairman about the possibility of the candidate's exercising such a ministry in another Circuit, such possibility being then discussed similarly between the candidate and the Circuit concerned. The candidate shall be nominated at the Circuit Meeting of the Circuit in which he or she is a member and Standing Order 701 shall apply, with the omission from clause (6) of the words '(if the candidate is married or to be married before entry into college)'. The Circuit in which it is envisaged that the candidate will exercise such a ministry shall send to its District Policy Committee an outline of the proposed scheme.
- (4) Standing Orders 702, 703, 704, 705 and 707 clauses (1) to (5) shall apply, but not Standing Order 707(6). A candidate in this category can be considered only for service based in the territory in which he or she is a member, and Standing Order 706 shall accordingly not apply.
- (5) Standing Orders 710, 718 and 719 shall apply, but not Standing Orders 711 to 717. The connexional Candidates Examination Committee shall

recommend in each case the nature of the training required. Training shall be under the general direction of the connexional Probationers' Oversight Committee in consultation with the Probationers Committee of the District in which the candidate is a member or, upon being stationed, is a probationer. The candidate shall spend at least one year before ordination stationed as a probationer in circuit work appropriate to the type of scheme under which the appointment under clause (6) is proposed to be made. When the connexional committee is satisfied that the requirements of training and probation have been fulfilled, the candidate shall be presented to the Conference for reception of the district Synod.

- (6) Standing Order 548 shall not apply. If as a result of the discussions referred to in clause (3) above or of further consultations after nomination (which it shall be the responsibility of the Chairman to initiate whenever necessary) a scheme for the exercise of the candidate's ministry in a Circuit, containing clear provisions as to the particular responsibilities of the proposed appointment, has been agreed between those concerned and approved by the Circuit Meeting and has received the necessary approval under Standing Order 438, then upon reception into full connexion and ordination the minister shall be appointed to that Circuit. For the purposes of Section 54 the minister shall be deemed to have received an initial invitation to that Circuit, and Standing Order 543 to 547, 549 and 736 shall apply accordingly. If no such scheme has been duly agreed and approved, clause (8) below shall apply as at the end of an appointment and it shall be the responsibility of the Chairman to continue to seek a suitable first appointment in which the above conditions as to agreement and approval of the scheme are fulfilled; when such an appointment has been found the minister shall at the next available opportunity be stationed accordingly under the provisions of this clause.
- (7) If the appointment of such a minister to a first or subsequent Circuit comes to an end, the minister shall not be appointed to a local appointment in any other Circuit unless (i) it is one in or near which the minister resides or intends to reside when the appointment takes effect, (ii) a scheme for the exercise of the minister's ministry in that Circuit, containing clear provisions as to the particular responsibilities in that appointment, has been agreed between those concerned and approved by the Circuit Meeting, and (iii) the necessary approval under Standing Order 438 has been obtained. Subject to these requirements the minister shall upon invitation in accordance with Standing Orders 540 to 542 be appointed by the Conference to that Circuit and Standing Orders 543 to 547, 549 and 736 shall apply to that appointment.
- (8) If the appointment of such a minister to a first or subsequent Circuit comes to an end and the minister is not immediately appointed to another Circuit in accordance with clause (7) above, the minister's name shall, until he or she is so appointed or becomes supernumerary, appear in the stations under the Circuit in which he or she resides as 'without appointment'. Such a minister shall then have the rights and privileges of a church member in that Circuit and shall be expected to give such help to that Circuit as he or she is able.

- (9) A minister in a local appointment who wishes to become subject to normal stationing and entitled to the normal allowances and benefits, shall consult and give all relevant information to the Chairman of the District, who shall be responsible for obtaining a report from the medical sub-committee of the General Purposes Committee and for supplying all necessary information to the Secretary of the Conference for the consideration of the Stationing Committee which may grant or refuse the application.
- (10) A minister who is subject to normal stationing may apply to become a minister in a local appointment. The application shall be made to the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments and that committee shall make a recommendation to the Stationing Committee which may grant or refuse the application. Consideration shall be given to the scheme by which the local ministry will be exercised, and no application shall be granted unless an appointment complying with clause (7) above can and will be made. It shall also be considered, in any event, whether taking account of all the circumstances it would be more appropriate for the applicant to apply to be without appointment under Standing Order 762.
- (11) Except where expressly excluded above the Standing Orders otherwise in force apply to persons who are or wish to become ministers in local appointments.

III. Other changes in part 7

1. **Standing Order 701.** Add a new clause (8):
The Circuit Meeting in voting upon a candidate for ministry in a local appointment shall whenever possible have placed before it an outline scheme of the way in which the candidate's ministry will be exercised in that or another Circuit.
2. **Standing Order 703.** Add a new clause (4):
The district Candidates Committee in voting upon a candidate for ministry in a local appointment shall whenever possible receive the comments of the relevant district Policy Committee on the proposed scheme for the exercise of a candidate's ministry in a Circuit.
3. **Standing Order 705.** Add a new clause (5):
The committee in voting upon a candidate for ministry in a local appointment shall have placed before it the proposed scheme for the exercise of the candidate's ministry in a Circuit.
4. **Standing Order 730(8).** Add at the end of the first sentence 'or to become ministers in local appointments'.
5. **Standing Order 731(3).** Insert at the beginning: 'Except where Standing Order 746 applies'.
6. **Standing Order 737(1).** In the fifth line, after 'that minister is' insert 'a minister in a local appointment or' and at the beginning of the eighth line insert 'local appointments or'.

7. Rename **Section 74** as 'Ministers in sector, local and other appointments'.
8. **Standing Order 751** Add a new clause (7)
The above clauses of this Standing Order shall not apply to ministers or probationers in appointments under Standing Order 746, except that they shall be entitled in accordance with clause (2) above to have all essential expenses incurred in the discharge of their responsibilities defrayed in full by the Circuits to which they are appointed.
9. **Standing Order 752(1)** In the second sentence, after 'supernumeraries,' insert 'ministers in local appointments,'.
10. **Standing Order 753** Add a new clause (6):
This Standing Order and clause (2) of Standing Order 754 shall not apply to ministers and probationers in appointments under Standing Order 746, who shall be wholly responsible for the provision of their own accommodation and furniture.
11. **Standing Order 762** Add a new clause (10):
This Standing Order shall not apply to a minister who is without appointment by the operation of Standing Order 746(6) or (8) or Standing Order 763(3).
12. **Standing Order 772** In clause (1) after 'Standing Order' insert '746, 762, 763(3)'.
13. **Standing Order 773** After 'connexion' insert ', other than ministers in local appointments,'.

IV. Consequential changes

1. **Standing Order 335** In clause (3) add
(viii) perform the functions prescribed by Standing Order 746(10) in relation to ministry in local appointments.
2. **Standing Order 365** In clause (3)(a) after 'other than' insert 'ministers in local appointments,'; in clause (13) after 'becomes' insert 'a minister in a local appointment,'.
3. **Standing Order 438** Add a new clause (3):
The provisions of clause (1) above shall not apply where a Circuit applies for the appointment of a minister to a local appointment under Standing Order 746. In every case where such an appointment is sought the Circuit shall submit the proposed scheme to the committee, which shall consider and make recommendations thereon to the Synod. No such appointment shall be made without the approval of the Synod.
4. **Standing Order 528** In the title delete 'Additional' and number the existing Standing Order as (1);
Add a new clause (2):
When a Circuit desires the appointment of a minister to a local appointment under Standing Order 746, application shall be made through the district Policy Committee to the Synod.

5. **Standing Order 606(5)** After 'other appointments' insert 'ministers and probationers appointed to the Circuit under Standing Order 746 but without pastoral charge,'.
6. **Standing Order 967(2)** In head (ii) after '618(3)' insert ', of a minister in a local appointment under Standing Order 746'.

V. Changes in Agendas

District Policy Committee

Meeting I (C.P.D. page 420)

Add a new question 5E: Has any scheme been submitted by a Circuit for the exercise of ministry in a local appointment where the proposed person is at present a candidate for the ministry? What comments upon the scheme do we make to the district Candidates Committee?

Meeting II (C.P.D. page 421/2)

in 17 insert a new question:

- (dd) the proposal by any Circuit for the appointment of a minister to a local appointment,

RESOLUTION 7

The Conference adopts the recommendation that no move should at present be made to introduce the historic episcopate into the Methodist system.

RESOLUTION 8

The Conference adopts the remaining parts of the Report not dealt with in the foregoing resolutions.

(Agenda 1988, pp.823-879)

The Conference adopted Resolutions 1, 4, 6 and 8, and resolved that Resolution 7 be not put.

The Conference adopted Resolution 2, deleting 'and encourages their development' and adding 'and in order to encourage their development directs the President's Council to ensure that the allocation of resources by the Budget Committee recognises their priority'.

The Conference adopted Resolution 3, in 339 *Lay Workers* (2)(v) deleting 'including two persons currently' and inserting 'of whom at least eight shall be persons currently or recently'.

The Conference adopted Resolution 5, adding in section (c) to SO 740(2): 'other than one directly controlled by the Methodist Church', and amending SO 740(3) by substituting 'industrial chaplaincies' for 'chaplaincies to Industrial Missions'.

(ii) The Ministry of the Word and Sacraments

CRITERIA FOR THE TRANSFER OF MINISTERS (1993)

1. In 1992 the General Purposes Committee offered to the Conference a report on the criteria for the transfer of ministers which was referred back after debate in the Ministerial Session for “light revision”. The Committee referred it to the joint working party originally set up by itself and the Faith and Order Committee, and the report is now re-submitted in amended form with the support of both committees.
2. Standing Order 725 governs the transfer of Methodist ministers to other conferences and churches, and the transfer of ministers from such churches into full connexion with the Conference. Clause (1) states that “it shall be competent for the Conference to transfer ministers in full connexion to other conferences and to other churches with which we are in communion, when mutually approved.” Clause (8) requires that a recommendation to receive a minister into full connexion should be accompanied by a recommendation “whether the applicant should be admitted by the Conference into full connexion as a person already ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments in a church whose ministry is recognised by the Methodist Church, or should be ordained upon admission into full connexion.” The interviewing committee is required to consult the Faith and Order Committee in cases of doubt.
3. The Methodist Church has no official definition of the terms used in these Standing Orders, apart from some short Faith and Order Committee reports to the Conferences of 1968 and 1970 in the context of what was then generally referred to as intercommunion. Relevant extracts are quoted below. A “full statement of the meaning we attach to the nature and extent of communion between Churches”, the preparation of which was authorised by the Conference of 1968, seems not to have materialised. Moreover there is no standard definition of the terminology in ecumenical discussion, nor does the discussion of these matters stand still. There is need for further exploration of the matter by the Methodist Church.
4. No list exists of churches with which we are in communion or whose ministry we recognise, and it is not easy to see how an exhaustive list could be compiled. In applying the Standing Orders interviewing committees have therefore to work from general principles, and from time to time they have encountered difficulties. The General Purposes Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, has therefore attempted to spell out more fully our understanding of the criteria to be applied, in the hope that it may be useful for reference in the future. How does one identify a church with which the Methodist Church is in communion? How does one determine whether the

ministry of another church is recognised by the Methodist Church? The results of this exercise are now offered to the Conference for endorsement.

5. One of the principal difficulties in discussing this subject is the wide range of meanings which may be attached to the terms used. Thus the term “in communion” may be used:
 - (a) of the relationship (sometimes described as “full communion”) which exists between local churches within one denomination, as, for example, the parishes of the Church of England are in communion within one diocese or province. It implies the acceptance of a common ecclesial authority (with whatever powers) of a bishop, synod, conference or assembly. In normal Methodist usage the expression for this is “in connexion”.
 - (b) of the relationship between two different churches, whether of the same denominational family or not, by virtue of which members are mutually recognised and readily transferable, and ministers can be used interchangeably, without formal transfer, although some further process of authorisation may be required. This relationship is to be seen, for example, between the British Conference and the Irish or other autonomous conferences.
 - (c) of a relationship in which Holy Communion is shared. One church is said to be in communion with another when its members are freely accepted at the Lord’s Table. Such a relationship exists among many of the Free Churches in Britain, even though, as with Baptist churches, there may be limitations to the free transfer of members.
6. These definitions, however, do not answer our questions. The first is too narrow. Questions about the transfer of ministers only arise between churches which are not in communion in this sense. The second describes the relationship in which such questions do arise and gives some examples, but offers no criteria by which to determine which churches belong in this category. The third draws attention to an important point. The fullest expression of communion must involve mutual acceptance at the Lord’s Table. It suffers however from the fact that it is applied differently in different Christian traditions. In Methodist tradition eucharistic hospitality would be offered to members of any church who felt free in conscience to accept it, on the grounds of the unity already given us in Christ. For other traditions, such hospitality is a sign of things to come, a mutual pledge of churches seeking a unity not yet realised. For other traditions again it is the goal of unity, to be celebrated only by those churches which are in communion in the first of the senses outlined in paragraph 5. To define communion only in terms of the sharing of the eucharist, without reference to relationships between churches, does not help with the issue before us.
7. These different definitions do, however, underline the fact that the term “communion” points both to identity and difference. By its use churches seek to transcend what divides them by the affirmation of the unity given in Christ which they share. Of necessity therefore it will always be an imprecise term. Negatively, it will be used to indicate those groups with whom there does not exist sufficient agreement in faith or practice for the Methodist Church to consider itself to be in communion at all. At the other end of the spectrum it

will be used to express the goal to which the church on earth is called but which is perfectly achieved only in the church triumphant. Between these two extremes it will be needed in the present divided state of the church to express that degree or quality of unity along the way that particular churches have already reached. As ecumenical relationships advance this quality of provisionality in the term will become more apparent. It is clear that with some of our ecumenical partners in Britain it is not yet possible to affirm mutual acceptance in all aspects of church life, nor move to greater integration, still less formal union, yet how could one say that the Methodist Church is not in communion with such churches when Sunday by Sunday Methodist congregations are committed, with official approval, to sharing with them in worship, including Holy Communion?

8. The Methodist Church recognises in many churches marks of authentic Christian faith and life, and seeks, notwithstanding differences of faith and order, to join with them in common prayer, witness and service. In the Standing Order, however, the term “in communion” is used in connection with the transfer of ministers, as ministers, to another church. That implies a greater area of common ground in faith and order than might be the case in some of the relationships referred to above. To be in communion with the Methodist Church for this purpose it is to be expected that a church
 - (a) claims to be an expression of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ;
 - (b) recognises other Christian communities outside its own fellowship, including the Methodist Church, as belonging to the Body of Christ;
 - (c) accepts the Trinitarian faith as set forth in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, whether or not it makes formal use of the creeds in public worship or official statements;
 - (d) acknowledges the authority of the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation; and
 - (e) recognises and practices the two biblical sacraments of baptism and Lord’s Supper;
 - (f) possesses a (presbyteral) ministry of word and sacraments to which candidates are ordained for life;
 - (g) does not by its officially authorised teaching and practice repudiate the standards of personal and social ethics which, in Methodist understanding, the Church of Jesus Christ is called to uphold;
 - (h) is willing to receive a Methodist minister by transfer, without further ordination.

We judge that these conditions are essential if there is to be a genuine transfer of a minister to a church in which the ministry to which he or she has been ordained can continue to be exercised. Where such conditions do not exist, we would expect a Methodist minister to resign rather than apply for transfer.

9. We turn now to the second issue, the recognition of ministries. The discussion is again confused by the fact that this expression is capable of more than one meaning.

10. There are many pastoral, preaching and diaconal ministries in all the churches which are the gift of the Spirit and made fruitful by God, and accorded recognition by the churches concerned in different ways. The Methodist Church acknowledges these for what they are. In the context of the Standing Order, however, recognition of ministry refers to the ministry of presbyters in the Church of God. Just as the Methodist Church (in the language of the Deed of Union) “cherishes its place in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church”, and therefore believes that Methodist ministers are ordained as presbyters in the Church of God, so it acknowledges ordination in other churches as ordination to the one presbyterate. Such ordination is not repeatable. When a minister of another church applies to be received into full connexion it is therefore important to determine whether the authorisation he or she has received is to be seen as ordination to the presbyterate. Where that is not the case, the applicant is received as a probationer and subsequently ordained. That is not to deny the pastoral ministry which such persons have been exercising. Indeed it is acknowledged by the fact that we receive them by transfer and do not require them to offer as candidates.
11. Recognition of ministries is thus distinct from the issue of communion between churches, although the two are related, and it is to be observed that the Standing Order implicitly observes the distinction. While it is possible to transfer a minister, in the strict sense, only to or from a church which is willing to accept or effect such a transfer, it is not our practice to require an ordained minister of a church which is not in that category (for example, an Anglican or Roman Catholic) to submit to local preacher training and all the other requirements and procedure expected of lay candidates, nor do we seek to repeat the ordination. We use the procedure and language of transfer even though the degree of communion is less and there are no formal procedures in the previous church for effecting such a transfer (though of course there may be expressions of commendation and goodwill). On the other hand, for ordination to be recognised by the Methodist Church as ordination in the Church of God, it must be an act of a body with which there is some measure of communion, even if impaired. That body must be acknowledged to be a Christian church.
12. But terminology and practice differ in different traditions. By what marks is the Conference to judge that what has been given and received is ordination as the Methodist Church understands it?
13. Some earlier reports to the Conference have taken for granted that the criterion is the use of prayer with the laying on of hands. This is the invariable practice of the Methodist Church in ordination. It is too narrow a criterion, however, and would invalidate some earlier practice prior to Methodist Union, when in some traditions the right hand of fellowship was used. In more recent times the Faith and Order Committee has advised against requiring the laying on of hands to have been used for an ordination to be recognised when all the other elements of an ordination are present, and the Conference has upheld that view in particular cases. Rather, the following is suggested. For ordination to the presbyterate to be recognised by the Methodist Church:
 - (a) there must be an intention, however expressed, to ordain to the ministry of word and sacraments in the Church of God;
 - (b) it must carry an expectation of life-long commitment;

- (c) it must therefore, according to the discipline of the church concerned, be unrepeatable;
 - (d) it must be an act, normally the laying-on of hands, which is accompanied by prayer in the setting of an act of worship;
 - (e) it must be an act which carries the full authority of the church, however that is expressed in terms of the ecclesiology of the church concerned;
 - (f) it must be an act which is recognised and transferable within the churches of the denomination as a whole, and not be confined in its effect to a single congregation.
14. It is impossible to anticipate all the questions of interpretation which may arise as applicants may present themselves in the future from a wide variety of Christian traditions in Britain and elsewhere. There is wisdom in confining the Standing Order itself to the briefest possible statement of requirements, and the Committee proposes no change. But it is hoped that if the Conference approves the amplification suggested above it will help interviewing committees to come to a decision on cases where there is no precedent to guide them.

NOTE: Extracts from previous Conference reports.

“We assume that we are in complete communion with all those Churches which acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, and who are willing to be in communion with us, and it is our custom to welcome to the Lord’s Table communicant members of other Churches. But we have so far never closely defined the meaning of “full communion”, nor is there any list of Churches with which we have formally established relations of full communion. We have the fullest reciprocal relations with all other Methodist Churches; and our membership of the Free Church Federal Council implies relations of intercommunion with other members of that Council.” (1968)

“Our usage of the term “Full Communion” is deliberately comprehensive. In general we mean by it the fullest possible recognition of and cooperation with other Churches, including mutual recognition of the validity of orders and willingness to receive and transfer members from and to other churches. We draw attention to the definitions used in the Report *Intercommunion Today* and suggest that these definitions should be borne in mind, especially when Anglican attitudes are being considered.

“Each enquiry about our relationships with another Church is dealt with in the light of all the circumstances. Where ministerial status within Methodism is desired without further ordination, we require assurance that the church to which the minister belongs adheres to the apostolic faith, and that he has been ordained by the laying on of hands with prayer.” (1970)

(*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* pp.198-199)

RESOLUTION

(Shared business) The Conference adopts the report.

(*Agenda 1993, pp.725-729*)

The extracts from previous reports, cited in paragraph 14, can now be found in Volume 1 of *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, pp. 149 and 150.*

ECUMENICAL ORDINATION (1996)

- 1 The Conference of 1995 received the following Memorial (M20):

The Llanelli and Carmarthen (8/19) Circuit Meeting (Present 17. Vote: Unan) which is currently forming an LEP in Carmarthen is deeply concerned about the status of possible future candidates for ordained ministry who enjoy joint membership of several denominations, and who may wish to retain their allegiance to all.

We have been alerted to the real possibility of future difficulties through the requirement placed on our present (probationer) minister to choose ordination in one denomination only. We therefore seek an urgent review of the underlying issues, and ask the Conference to submit the documents "Ecumenical Ordination" (Canon James S Newcome 1993) and "Ecumenical Ordination" (Rev June Mallabon 1995) to Faith and Order (or their successors) for a considered theological judgment on their contents, together with recommendations for practical solutions.

- 2 The Conference referred the Memorial to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration, consultation with appropriate ecumenical and church bodies, and report to the Conference of 1996.
- 3 In responding to this Memorial, the Faith and Order Committee has been aware that it arises from a particular set of circumstances but has wider ramifications. The particular case is that of a probationer who was received into membership in a Local Ecumenical Partnership where she enjoyed the membership of several denominations. Though her offer for ordained ministry was accepted by the Methodist Church, she has consistently pressed for 'ecumenical ordination' and has been reluctant to submit to what she regards as exclusively Methodist ordination. She is currently serving as a probationer in the Circuit which sent Memorial M20.
- 4 The Faith and Order Committee had been aware of these circumstances before the Memorial was sent to the Conference and had indeed been asked for theological advice in 1994.
- 5 The Committee has read the documents mentioned in the Memorial and has sent a considered judgment on them to the Llanelli and Carmarthen Circuit Meeting. It is important that there should be no doubt about what those documents advocate. It is already possible for an ordained person of another denomination to be the assisting minister, chosen by the candidate, at an ordination. The Newcome and Mallabon papers argue that a further step be taken. They argue for joint ordination, enabling the person ordained to be fully a minister in two or more churches.
- 6 The Committee believes that it can best report to the Conference on this matter by starting with a few theological premisses about ordination and denominationalism, moving on to consider whether in exceptional cases the

theology might allow for some variation, and then reporting on the action it has taken.

- 7 Ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, as understood in Methodism, is not to be regarded as simply 'denominational'. In other words, a person is ordained to presbyteral ministry in the Church of God, not simply in the Methodist Church. It is not clear what two presiding ministers could add to the act of one, especially in a context where each church involved already recognised the validity of the orders of the others, except to denominationalise an essentially undenominational act.
- 8 Nevertheless, though presbyteral ordination is an essentially undenominational act, it does confer authority to act as a presbyter within a particular denomination. Ordaining ministers act in the name of their Churches. It would be extremely unusual for a Church to give authority for the ordination of a person who was not going to serve as a minister under the discipline of the Church concerned.
- 9 There is a long-established tradition whereby a minister of another Church may take part in a service of ordination according to the Methodist rite as an assisting minister who joins the presiding minister in the laying on of hands. This is an act of ecumenical solidarity, but it is never understood as imparting the orders of another denomination. Indeed, assisting ministers of other churches are always informed of the Methodist understanding that presbyteral ordination is ordination within the universal Church.
- 10 The Methodist Church is deeply committed to the search for Christian Unity according to Christ's will and has often shown itself willing to move in new directions if it believes that such action will bring such unity nearer. Shortly after the Memorial was referred to the Committee, the Committee received a letter from the General Secretary of ENFYSS, the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales. The letter reported that the Commission was aware of the Memorial and had adopted a resolution endorsing its "support for ways and means to be found for the ordination of ministerial candidates to ministry within two or more of its covenanted churches". "In adopting its resolution, the Commission did so in the light of that Clause in the 1975 Covenant that states that 'We intend to seek an agreed pattern of ordained ministry which will serve the gospel in unity . . . '". The letter further reported that the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Methodism's partner in the Local Ecumenical Partnership to which the Memorial refers) "would offer every co-operation with the pursuit of this resolution".
- 11 The Covenant that exists in Wales provides a context in which it is possible to look again at the question of joint ordination. Twenty years ago, the Methodist Church was one of four churches in Wales which entered into a solemn Covenant to seek for visible unity. As a means of enabling that process to advance, joint ordination could be seen as a small step or contribution towards the unity to which the Covenanted Churches are committed. There is no sense in which such a joint ordination could be regarded as necessary, but as an ecumenical gesture or sign it could be significant.

- 12 As well as preparing and reporting its comments on the papers written by James Newcome and June Mallabon, the Committee has acted as follows to fulfil the responsibilities laid upon it by the reply of the Conference to Memorial M20.
- 13 The Committee, sensible of both the particular circumstances which prompted the Memorial and the wider implications of either accepting or rejecting the possibility of joint ordination, has throughout consulted and acted in concert with the Division of Ministries and the Conference Office.
- 14 Representatives of all three have met with senior officers of the Presbyterian Church of Wales and reached agreement that there is no sense in which joint ordination is **necessary** in order for a person to exercise a full ministry, including a sacramental ministry, in either church, but that a joint ordination service could be envisaged in the Welsh context **as a symbolic gesture within the context of the Covenant**, which could make a contribution towards the goal of visible unity. The Faith and Order Committee concurs with this judgement.
- 15 The Faith and Order Committee was clear that joint ordination on this basis could only be sanctioned if the following conditions could be fulfilled:
 - a) It would need to be apparent that there was no doctrinal divergence between the Churches involved so significant that it would be impossible for one person to be faithful to the doctrinal standards of both or all;
 - b) There would need to be agreement about the Ordinal to be used and sufficient convergence of view about what was happening in the ordination;
 - c) It must be possible to come to an agreement about questions of discipline and authority.
- 16 The Committee notes that it would be necessary to decide, whenever a request for joint ordination occurred, whether or not these criteria could be fulfilled. In the particular case which must be decided by the 1996 Conference, the Committee believes that there would be no difficulty about any of them. No significant doctrinal barrier stands in the way. If the Conference agrees to a joint ordination, the Faith and Order Committee, acting on the Conference's behalf, could be involved in the preparation and authorisation of the ordinal to be used.
- 17 As to c), for one person to be in relationship with two churches simultaneously raises real difficulties, but they are not insuperable. On a day to day basis, oversight and pastoral care should be provided by the appropriate persons in both (or all) churches involved. The substantial question of discipline and jurisdiction, however, would require the clear procedure which follows to be established.
- 18 While a person jointly ordained remained in an appointment in which he or she served two Churches, the one Church would delegate its responsibilities for discipline and jurisdiction to the other; in other words, one Church would act on behalf of both, by mutual agreement. If the minister were subsequently to

serve in a purely Methodist appointment, jurisdiction would continue to be Methodist. If she or he were to serve in an appointment in the other Church involved in the ordination, the Methodist Church would delegate its responsibilities for discipline and jurisdiction to that other Church.

- 19 Detailed recommendations regarding the case which prompted the Memorial will be presented to the Conference by the Division of Ministries. **The Faith and Order Committee advises the Conference that, in its judgment, there is no theological objection to joint ordination, provided that it occurs in the context of an existing Covenant, such as that in Wales, to seek for visible unity, and as a step towards that unity; provided that it is seen as a prophetic sign rather than as a requirement for the exercise of ministry in ecumenical circumstances; and provided that the conditions set out in paragraph 15 above can be fulfilled.**
- 20 The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to consult “with appropriate ecumenical and church bodies”. As reported in paragraphs 13 and 14, the Committee, through its representatives, has consulted with other Methodist bodies and with the Presbyterian Church of Wales. It has carefully considered the resolution passed by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales.
- 21 Finally, because there are wider ecumenical implications, the Committee has reported its actions, its recommendations and the reasons for them to the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, requesting that the matter of joint ordination in appropriate circumstances should be placed on the ecumenical agenda at that level.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts the report.

(Agenda 1996, pp.189-192)

(iii) The Diaconate

THE METHODIST DIACONAL ORDER (1993)

Contents

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Appendix

Resolutions

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 1988 Conference adopted the following resolutions :

The Conference resolves that the Wesley Deaconess Order shall be called the Methodist Diaconal Order and its members deaconesses or deacons according to gender. . .

The Conference resolves that the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who are received into full membership of the Order shall be ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God. . .

The Conference instructs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare a form of ordination to the diaconate. . . and report to the Conference of 1989.

- 1.2 The 1989 Conference received this report from the Faith and Order Committee:

The Conference of 1988 made a number of decisions regarding the Methodist Diaconal Order. In the judgment of the Committee, these

decisions could have far-reaching implications of a theological and constitutional nature.

The Committee therefore recommends that it be empowered by the Conference to give careful attention to these matters, in consultation with other appropriate bodies.

The Conference therefore adopted this resolution :

The Conference instructs the Committee, in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, to consider the theological and constitutional implications of the decisions of the Conference of 1988 in relation to the Methodist Diaconal Order, and to report to the Conference.

- 1.3 The Faith and Order Committee set up a joint Working Party with representatives of the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Law and Polity Committee. This report is the result of three years' deliberation and consultation, not least with the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order.
- 1.4 What are the "far-reaching implications of a theological and constitutional nature" suggested by the apparently straightforward decisions of the 1988 Conference? The central theological issue is raised by the expression, "ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God". Throughout the greater part of the Christian world (including the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion) the meaning of that expression would not be in doubt. The reference would be to ordination to the first of the three "major orders of ministry" (the diaconate, the presbyterate, the episcopate – whose members are generally known, respectively, as deacons, priests and bishops).
- 1.5 Does the resolution of the 1988 Conference represent a decision that men and women be ordained to such an order of ministry? If so, what are the constitutional implications of that decision? If not, what other meaning can be attached to ordination "to the diaconate in the Church of God"? It is, of course, impossible to know what was in the minds of all who voted in favour of the 1988 resolutions, but the other questions cannot be evaded. Deacons and deaconesses either belong to an order of ministry, theologically comparable to the diaconate in the churches which have a three-fold ministry, or they do not.
- 1.6 If the former is true, there is a case to be made for amending Clause 4, the Doctrinal Clause, of the Deed of Union (see Appendix), which appears to recognize explicitly only one order of ministry, the presbyteral; from a constitutional point of view deacons and deaconesses are regarded as lay people. If, however, ordination to the diaconate in Methodism is understood as something entirely different from ordination to one of the three historic orders of ministry, there is theological work to be done to determine what that "something different" actually is.

1.7 The history of the diaconate from New Testament times onwards is complex, and it is not possible to do justice to it in this report. Nevertheless, some account of it needs to be offered if we are to deal responsibly with the questions now before us.

2. The New Testament and 'Deacons'

2.1 The most significant aspect of the New Testament material is that the key noun, *diakonos*, and the related abstract noun, *diakonia*, and the verb, *diakoneo*, are used most frequently in generalised ways conveying a range of agency and service. It might be noted that, as is also true of contemporary pagan usage, this range is broader than the narrow conceptions of service, or even 'waiting on tables', often claimed for the fundamental idea behind 'deacon'. Only a few passages require specific attention for our purposes.

2.2 Phil. 1.1 supplies the earliest, clearest reference to 'deacons' in a (semi)-official sense. Paul addresses 'all the saints who are in Philippi together with (the) bishops (or overseers) and deacons'. Since this pairing is not mentioned elsewhere in this or Paul's other letters, a clear picture of their function is not attainable, and they may have been a local development in Philippi. Neither can we relate them to that other group, the elders, who appear in some other New Testament writings but not in the genuine Pauline letters. The fluidity of Paul's understanding of ministry prevents us from speaking of defined 'orders' in his churches during his lifetime.

2.3 This fluidity is apparent in Paul's other uses of the term which range from denying that Christ was a 'deacon', that is, an agent, of sin (Gal. 2.17) to affirming the state as the 'deacon' of God (Rom. 13.4). Among these Paul can also speak of himself and his fellow-workers as 'deacons' of the new covenant or of God through their ministry (eg. 2 Cor. 3.6; 6.4).

2.4 The description of Phoebe as 'deacon of the church in Cenchrea' (Rom. 16.1) is ambiguous. Apparently wealthy enough to offer some form of patronage (v.2), she may have been noted for her service within the church, or, perhaps more probably, acted as an agent of the church at least in visiting Paul and travelling on to the church in Rome; the term may carry a developing technical note but says little about any more specific function within the church. So too Epaphras, Tychicus (Col. 1.7; 4.7), and, less clearly, the house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16.15) fulfilled functions of '*diakonia*' for Paul within the church.

2.5 These hints of an emerging technical use of the term 'deacons' in the Pauline churches are confirmed by the probably post-Pauline 1 Timothy, where, alongside the continuing general usage, we find specific instructions to 'deacons' (3. 8-13), here again in conjunction with the bishop/overseer, to whom they were perhaps assistants of some sort. The character demanded of 'deacons' is no more than that which might be expected of any good Christian – a firm grasp of the faith and being of tried and good standing. Again this tells us little about their functions. The parallel injunction to seemliness enjoined 'on the women likewise'

(v.11) may refer to women deacons or the wives of the men just addressed. Later (ch.5) the letter addresses the elders (male and female) alongside widows and younger men and women; mention of the double honour (? or honorarium) due to elders who preside well (v. 17-18) suggests they at least are approaching a formal status, but one which is not specifically related to the bishop/overseer and deacons of ch.3.

- 2.6 The most ambiguous passage is Acts 6. 1-6, the appointment of the seven who are to free the apostles for 'prayer and the *diakonia* of the word' by taking on the '*diakonia* at tables'. Although this passage soon came to be seen as the origin of the diaconate, the seven are nowhere named deacons, while both they and the apostles have separate functions, both of which are called '*diakonia*'. In fact, once appointed, the most prominent of the seven, Stephen and Philip, engage in preaching; Luke's account may reflect his awareness of different roles within the life of the church but gives us little on which to reconstruct them or to relate it to the later diaconate.
- 2.7 The lack of clarity in the New Testament on the origins of the diaconate is only one aspect of its lack of precision concerning formalised ministry in general. All this suggests a diffuse and uneven development under the impact of local experience or needs and of the influence of Jewish or Graeco-Roman models.

3. The Diaconate in the Early Church

- 3.1 Although the New Testament evidence suggests a diffuse and uneven development, writings from the following centuries show the office of deacon gradually taking on a precise meaning, distinct from that of bishop or presbyter. The period from c.100 to c.600 A.D. has been highlighted as a time of special importance for the diaconate, both in terms of the number of deacons and the range and significance of their work.
- 3.2 The earliest Christian documents outside the New Testament reflect the process of transition from a fluid understanding of various ministries towards the threefold office of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The later hierarchical order of ministry cannot properly be read back into the early Christian communities. Clement of Rome (96), for example, refers to leaders of the church at Corinth as 'bishops and deacons', but also as 'presbyters'. However, while he seems to employ the terms 'bishop' and 'presbyter' interchangeably, his use of 'deacon' appears to denote a different kind of leadership. Ignatius of Antioch (who died around A.D.107) is the first to distinguish the threefold order. Within the local church, the bishop presides in the council of presbyters that rules the community. Ignatius refers to the deacons as specially entrusted with "the ministry of Jesus Christ" and sees them as representing Christ, "just as the bishop has the role of the Father and the presbyters are like God's council and an apostolic band" (*Trallians* 3). But in documents of this period, much is unclear, including the relationship between bishop and presbyter and the relation of presbyter and deacon, since sometimes deacons seem to have been part of the ruling council. This lack of clarity

reflects diverse patterns of church life that would gradually coalesce into new structures. Some early documents reflect Phil. 1: 1 and 1 Tim. 3: 8-13 by pairing together the bishop and the deacon as overseer and servant of the Church. We should note that the deacon is the servant of the *Church*, rather than of the bishop, though naturally at times deacons assist the bishop as the leading officer of the congregation.

- 3.3 Just as the orders of ministry in early Christian communities are more fluid than later practice would suggest, so too the function of the deacon is less clearly demarcated than in later times. The deacon as the one entrusted with “the ministry of Christ”, and as the servant of the Church has already been mentioned. But what, more specifically, was the role of deacons? Ignatius says “they do not serve mere food and drink, but minister to God’s Church” (*Trallians* 2). This may refer to the part deacons soon took at the Eucharist – Justin Martyr in c. 150 refers to the deacons as the distributors of the consecrated bread and wine. But for Ignatius and other early Christians the agape or fellowship meal was closely connected with the Eucharist. Thus the deacon’s involvement in the liturgy expresses a servant ministry for the spiritual and physical nourishment of the Church. This linking of the spiritual and material becomes a hallmark of the deacon’s work in the early Church.
- 3.4 The deacon’s practical, administrative role was to coordinate pastoral care and act as the bishop’s special helper. *The Shepherd of Hermas* assigns to deacons the responsibility of care for widows and orphans (in a passage which may date from c.96, but more probably from c.150). In Rome by c.250, the city was divided into seven quarters looked after by seven deacons, under the influence of Acts 6. As the churches grew in size and wealth, the role of administering church property to ensure care for the poor grew in significance. The deacon’s role as assistant to the bishop (rather than servant of the Church) became much more marked. The *Pseudo-Clementines* (c.200) describe deacons as the “eye” of the bishop to search out the needs of the people; Hippolytus (c.215) describes the deacon as the bishop’s servant. The Syrian *Didascalia* (c.225-250) says that as no-one can approach the Father except through Christ, so the people should deal with the bishop via the deacon. Bishops used the skills of deacons in a wide variety of ways. Cyprian (d.258) and others sent deacons as emissaries to fellow bishops. The British Church was represented at the Council of Arles (c.314) by three bishops and a deacon. Athanasius was chief deacon – archdeacon – of Alexandria when he took his stand against Arius at Nicaea (325). Because the deacon stood so close to the bishop, it was common for the chief deacon to succeed the bishop, as Athanasius did in Alexandria in 328.
- 3.5 The deacon also played an important role in the liturgy. At the early Eucharists, the bishop presided, and deacons took the bread and wine to those present, and to the absent. Hippolytus, writing c.215, reports that they brought the people’s offerings to the bishop, as part of the oblations at the Eucharist. Thus almsgiving had a place in the offertory of the Mass, and brought together the liturgical and practical aspects of the deacon’s work. The *Didascalia* expected the deacon to keep the people in order, and to guard the door. By c.380 we read of the deacon

announcing the stages in the rite and reading the Gospel (a role taken from the lector). Tertullian, c.200, reported that deacons, like presbyters, could be authorised by the bishop to baptise. Hippolytus describes them as assisting with the oils of exorcism and thanksgiving at baptism; blessing the Paschal candle at the Easter Vigil; catechising at weekday non-Eucharistic assemblies; blessing non-Eucharistic bread at fellowship meals in the bishop's absence. However, deacons were certainly put in charge of rural congregations. And sometimes deacons presided at the Eucharist, probably in the absence of the bishop or presbyter: the lines between the offices were not always firmly drawn. Such eucharistic presidency by deacons seems to have happened during the the Diocletian persecution, but it was forbidden by the Councils of Arles (314) and Nicaea (325).

- 3.6 The first conclusive evidence that women were ordained deacon comes from the East. The Syrian *Didascalia* lays down careful guidelines for their work. They were to minister to women in situations where the presence of a male deacon would cause a scandal: to care for the sick, and to take part in the baptism of women and instruct them afterwards. It has been suggested that the emphatic character of this teaching was an attempt to restrict the lively activities of women deacons. Later documents give women work similar to that described in the *Didascalia*: a scaled down version of the male deacon's role. Female deacons are the women's route to the ear of the bishop. In Monophysite and Nestorian congregations women gave the Eucharist to women and read the Scriptures in public. The word "deaconess" (diakonissa) first appears in the fourth century. The office of female deacon began to decline from the early fifth century: the nature of the diaconate was changing; her role at baptism became redundant as adult baptism fell into disuse. The growth of women's religious orders soon gave women new opportunities for a spiritual vocation, but traces of work by female deacons can be found until the eleventh or twelfth century.
- 3.7 By the end of the third century, deacons had a strong and distinctive identity. Church growth had made the deacon's role extremely important. The prestige of the deacon in administration and liturgy led to the creation of other orders, such as subdeacon and acolyte, who took on aspects of the deacon's work. By c.250 the idea of "grades" of ministry is present, though without the idea that these are steps through which to progress.
- 3.8 However, the diaconate was to become no more than a stepping-stone to the priesthood. This process began in the fourth century. The rapid expansion of the Church after it became the official religion of the Empire accelerated important processes that were already underway. First, the bishop and the presbyter in a sense exchanged roles: the bishop delegated presidency of the Eucharist in the local church to the presbyter; the presbyters surrendered their corporate oversight of the church to the bishop, who translated this oversight into a regional and personal office. Secondly, in assimilating the structures of the Roman Empire, the Church turned "grades" of ministry into "career structure" for clergy. All this threw the status of the diaconate into uncertainty. The growing

importance of the presbyter in the local church created tension with the deacon. The Council of Nicaea passed canons restricting deacons' activities. By c.500 deacons became assistants to presbyters in the local church, as once they had been assistants to the bishop.

- 3.9 Thus the hierarchy of bishop, priest and deacon was established (the word priest (*hierous*) comes into wide use at this point). But it took time to dislodge deacons from their former place. They continued to act as assistants to bishops, administering church property. Archdeacons sometimes succeeded their bishops without going through the step of becoming priests. Gregory the Great was made bishop and Pope in 590 as a deacon. In the East the separate identity of the diaconate proved more durable: there was less pressure to ascend the clerical ladder. In the West, however, the idea of the diaconate as a stepping-stone to the priesthood eventually became the norm, although the office could still be permanent.

4. The Diaconate in the Medieval West

- 4.1 The role of the diaconate in the medieval West was influenced by the currents of popular piety that swept the Church. The strong focus on the sacraments as channels of grace enhanced the role of the priest, who by his acts brought this sacred power to the people. The deacon, unable to pronounce absolution or celebrate Mass, became a probationer at the altar: it was common to be ordained priest within weeks of being ordained deacon. Deacons were not permitted to touch the consecrated bread and wine directly, and so did not distribute the bread, but only the chalice. Their place at the altar cost them their practical role of distributing alms to the needy: it was not thought right to mix proximity to such holy things with worldly concerns. Instead, responsibility for charity became widely dispersed. Religious orders and pious individuals provided almshouses and hospitals. Because it was a mark of piety to give to the poor, and a mark of holy asceticism to live on charity, religious beggars became numerous. Charity was extremely important but was no longer the responsibility of deacons. Their role was liturgical. They could preach, with the bishop's permission – a sign of the way their office was in practice being assimilated to that of the priest.

5. The Reformation and the Diaconate

- 5.1 For Protestants, new thinking about the priesthood of all believers and the Eucharist led to a rejection of the idea of a holy priesthood consecrated to offer the sacrifice of Christ anew. However this did not necessarily lead to a renewal of the diaconate. Lutherans and Zwinglians recognised only one pastoral office, a ministry of Word and Sacrament, though assistant pastors were sometimes called deacons. In England, the diaconate continued chiefly as a preparation for priesthood. The Reformed tradition was to make the most positive attempt to rethink the order (see 5.3), and may have influenced the English Ordinal of 1550, which gave the deacon a special ministry to the poor of the parish.
- 5.2 Reform of social welfare was an important part of the Reformers' agenda. In fact it was a concern for Protestants and Catholics alike. By

1500 lay Christians had come to take a prominent part in organising poor relief. The power of the State was growing, and across Europe there was a drive to centralise and rationalise the provision of care, placing responsibility in lay hands. The priesthood of all believers made all vocations holy, and most Protestants looked to Christian rulers to order social welfare (there was no notion that the State might not be Christian). Religious orders were dissolved and their assets taken over by the State. This is not to say that charity played a small part in Reformation piety. A “common chest” or poor box stood in church to receive gifts for the poor, and almsgiving became an important part of Protestant worship because of the Reformers’ concern to put something in place of the “offertory” of the Mass. But the funds were usually administered by civil officers.

5.3 Calvin’s concept of the diaconate integrated the reform of ministry and the reform of social welfare. He gave the diaconate a distinctive place as a permanent office, and established social welfare as an essential ministry of the Church and not simply a responsibility of civic authorities. He had been influenced by Martin Bucer’s work in Strasburg, where deacons were parish officers who cared for the sick and the poor. Calvin made deacons one of the four orders of ministry, in addition to the three presbyteral offices of pastor, teacher, and elder (elders, though lay people, formed part of the presbyterate in Calvin’s thinking because of the role in moral guidance and discipline). His exegesis of the New Testament led him to set out a twofold diaconate: “administrators”, men who collected and administered funds for the needy; and “nurses”, widows who provided practical care. The male deacon was superior, though only for order’s sake, not inherently. Widow deacons were not ordained. Geneva (to Calvin’s regret) never had widow deacons: their role was carried out by men. But female deacons were present in other Reformed communities until the seventeenth century, particularly in the Rhineland. Calvin insisted that deacons were not servants of the presbyters but of the Church. However, they were inferior to presbyters because worship (the imperative of the first part of the Ten Commandments) ranks above love (the imperative of the second). Thus Calvin dispensed with the liturgical role of deacons but strongly affirmed their work as a ministry of charity.

6. The Diaconate in Protestantism to the Nineteenth Century

6.1 In the Church of England, the diaconate continued to function primarily as a preparation for priesthood, though Fellows at Oxford and Cambridge often met their obligation to enter Holy Orders by becoming and remaining deacons. When John Wesley began to ordain ministers, he followed the familiar pattern of ordaining initially to the diaconate. Though this practice stopped with Wesley’s death, a service for the ordination of deacons remained in the Methodist service book until 1846. In the Reformed tradition in Europe and the New World, the purpose and effectiveness of the diaconate as Calvin had envisaged it diminished. There was confusion over the relationship between elder and deacon and over the deacon’s role after the advent of boards of church trustees to handle finance. Among British Independents (later Congregationalists) and Baptists the title ‘deacon’ was applied to lay leaders. Since each

local congregation was independent and, for example, ministers were called to serve by the local congregation, such deacons had considerable influence.

- 6.2 The revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a storm of practical activity that was diaconal in character if not in name. Numerous voluntary societies were formed to carry forward the mission of the Church, concerned not only with the proclamation of the Gospel but also with social welfare. Commitment to these societies stood alongside church membership. However, while such activity was encouraged by the churches, Christians took part essentially as individuals. That this was a *diaconal* ministry was not usually recognised, theologically or institutionally. This fact serves to remind us that continuity is more than a matter of words: diaconal service has continued to be offered in the Church even though it has not always been explicitly described in those terms. The new city mission movement of late nineteenth century Methodism represented an attempt to reach the unchurched by adapting church life to the urban setting. It took on board the concern for social relief which voluntary societies had been addressing.
- 6.3 However, nineteenth century Britain saw the renewal of the diaconate in different branches of Protestantism, most notably in orders of deaconesses, as part of the drive to meet the needs of the urban poor. In Scotland, Thomas Chalmers briefly revived the work of deacons for this purpose. Theodore Fliedner's community of deaconesses at Kaiserwerth, Germany, proved influential. Founded in 1836, it inspired diocesan institutes in England, which were formally organised in 1871. The Church of Scotland created an order of deaconesses in 1888. Methodism saw the start of the Wesley Deaconess Order and its counterpart in the United Methodist Free Churches.
- 6.4 The advent of deaconesses in late nineteenth century Britain was also influenced by the Oxford Movement, which revived interest in the celibate life, lived in community. As in medieval times, when new religious orders such as the Franciscans were devoted to the care of the poor, this revival embraced not only a commitment to the spiritual life but to social welfare. Methodism itself was prepared to experiment with new forms of Christian service. The Wesley Deaconess Order was one consequence of this, as were the "Sisters of the People" at the West London Mission and the "Sisters of the Children" in the National Children's Home. The ethos of the early itinerant ministry has also been likened to that of a religious order: the framework of a common vocation, discipline and association was not alien to Methodism.
- 6.5 The growing emancipation of women in the late nineteenth century made it important to find ways to recognise and channel women's work in the Church. From a modern perspective, the social context from which the Wesley Deaconess Order emerged had positive and negative implications for the order. On the one hand, the deaconesses' lifestyle and pioneering role set them apart, and led to the development of a strong sense of

vocation and community. On the other hand their talents were directed into a “safe” form of women’s ministry that did not encroach on presbyteral territory.

7. The Diaconate in British Methodism to 1978

- 7.1 The Wesleyan Order of Deaconesses was founded by the Reverend Dr Thomas Bowman Stephenson in 1890. Dr Stephenson had visited the deaconesses at Kaiserwerth in 1873 and he used this model for the formation of the Wesley Deaconess Order. In his book “Concerning Sisterhoods”, Stephenson laid down two principles about religious orders as he conceived they may be applied to British Methodism. First, there must be vocation but no vow. Second, there must be discipline but no servility. He envisaged the Order as “a soul-converting agency . . . the strong arm of the Church”. Stephenson set out three “great fields of usefulness” which would lie before the Sisters. First: moral and spiritual education, in connection with orphanages and industrial schools both at home and overseas. Second: ministry to the sick. Third: evangelistic visitation.
- 7.2 The United Free Methodist Churches had an order based on similar lines to the Wesleyan Order, founded in 1891 by the Reverend T.J.Cope with its headquarters at Bowron House, Wandsworth. In the Primitive Methodist Church the Reverend J.Flannigan, founder of St. Georges Hall in the Old Kent Road, began to train Sisters, and later the appointments came under the general care of Home Missions.
- 7.3 At Methodist Union the three Orders merged to form the Wesley Deaconess Order of the Methodist Church. 25 deaconesses came from the Primitive Methodist Order, 57 from the United Methodist Order and 290 from the Wesleyan Order.
- 7.4 The Book of Offices (1936) included a service for “The Ordination of Deaconesses”. The Wesleyan Order had previously used the word ‘Consecration’ defined as “the act of devoting to a sacred use.” The Book of Offices states that “we are met together for the ordination of women to the office and work of a Deaconess in the Church of God.” Later on the liturgy lists the services which may be required of a deaconess, including: preaching, leading worship, teaching, feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, caring for the needy, giving hope to the hopeless and befriending all. In all of this the deaconesses must be “true evangelists” of Jesus Christ, “translating your gospel into the language of personal service . . . not reckoning your ministry complete till all can say, Now we believe . . . “ The deaconesses are also reminded in the service that they are members of an Order “whose members must be jealous for its good name, honouring and helping one another, ready at all times to take up each other’s work, and loyally to carry it on.”
- 7.5 In 1942 the Methodist Conference adopted various resolutions concerning the Wesley Deaconess Order in an effort to improve the connexional status of the Order. Among these were resolutions on the following: candidates must intend life service; ordinands are to be

presented to the Conference and by resolution of the Conference to be admitted to full membership of the Order; continuity of service should be assured; stations of deaconesses are to be printed in the Minutes of Conference; ordained deaconesses in the active work are to be members of the Representative Session of the District Synod. In the Conference report of 1956 there was an indication of how the work of the Order had changed over the years. For many years the deaconesses had worked in the large city missions and their main tasks were visiting, leading class meetings and much large social work with the poor in the community. In 1956 half of the deaconesses were working on housing estates, in rural areas, Circuit churches, with Home Mission caravans, in youth work, in Chaplaincy, in welfare work and overseas with the Methodist Missionary Society. In 1965 Convocation agreed that as ordination to the office and work of a deaconess was for life, it was no longer necessary for deaconesses to resign from membership of the Order on marriage. Until now the Order had insisted upon celibacy.

- 7.6 In 1967 Methodist Conference agreed to the closure and sale of the college at Ilkley, where the Wesley deaconesses had been trained since 1902 and in 1968 approved the move to unite the training of deaconesses with the training of presbyteral ministers at Handsworth College in Birmingham. In 1970 Handsworth College closed and the deaconesses transferred their training to the ecumenical Queen's College in Birmingham. The Order bought a large house near the college which became the administrative headquarters of the Order, providing accommodation for staff and students.
- 7.7 In 1971 the Methodist Conference received the report of a working party on "The Place of the Wesley Deaconess Order in the Methodist Church of Today". This working party concluded: "we believe that the church needs and will continue to need the service of such a group of trained dedicated servants of Christ as form the Wesley Deaconess Order." In 1973 the Conference agreed to admit women to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and a large number of deaconesses offered as candidates for presbyteral ministry. It now became necessary for the distinctive role of the diaconate to be clearly defined. Many deaconesses had been used as substitutes for presbyters, they had been in pastoral charge appointments with dispensations to administer the sacraments. Now women could enter the presbyteral ministry the diaconate needed to establish its distinctive role in the ministry of the whole people of God. This did not happen, and the number of candidates offering for diaconal service continued to decline.
- 7.8 In 1978 the Conference accepted the recommendation of the Division of Ministries that recruitment for the Order should cease forthwith and that a Committee of the Division should consider the present role of the diaconate and redefine the place of diaconal ministry in Methodism for the future.

8 The Methodist Diaconal Order

8.1 The years following 1978 were painful and difficult for members of the Order but a good deal of hard thinking about ministry was being done and eventually in 1986 the Conference directed the Division of Ministries:

to invite those who believe themselves called to lifetime diaconal service to present themselves as candidates for membership of what is currently known as the Wesley Deaconess Order.

The Conference also directed the Division to arrange suitable selection and training processes and, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to consider “the liturgical form that would accompany reception into full membership of the Order”.

8.2 As mentioned above (1:1) the 1988 Conference adopted the following resolutions :

The Conference resolves that the Wesley Deaconess Order shall be called the Methodist Diaconal Order and its members deaconesses or deacons according to gender . . .

The Conference resolves that the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who are received into full membership of the Order shall be ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God . . .

The Conference instructs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare a form of ordination to the diaconate . . . and report to the Conference of 1989.

8.3 *The Ordination of Deacons and Deaconesses*, prepared by the Faith and Order Committee, was adopted and authorized by the 1989 Conference. It was first used during the Conference of 1990.

8.4 Since recruitment started again in 1986, what is now known as the Methodist Diaconal Order has enjoyed considerable renewal. Over sixty candidates have been accepted for training and there is a renewed sense of purpose and vigour among the deaconesses and deacons.

8.5 The theological and constitutional issues raised in section 1.4 of this report remain to be resolved.

9. Ecumenical Perspectives

9.1 We have noted the limited nature of the New Testament evidence on patterns of ministry and the diversity of understandings of diaconal ministry over the centuries. Our survey has also revealed that the Church has often shaped its patterns of ministry in response to perceived need, as when the Seven were appointed (Acts 6) and when John Wesley overcame his reservations and allowed lay men and women to preach. We have seen that various forms of diaconal ministry have been exercised at different times and in different places, and we now move towards an understanding of diaconal ministry in Methodism in our time.

9.2 British Methodism is by no means alone in experiencing a rejuvenation of the diaconate:

Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. (World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Commentary 31)

Churches, including some within the Anglican Communion and the Church of Rome, though they have inherited a transitional diaconate, largely perceived as a stepping-stone to the priesthood, are increasingly recognizing vocations to a permanent diaconate. David Hope, the Bishop of London, has remarked that, where this has happened,

the re-establishing of a permanent and distinctive diaconate has rightly restored the work and office of a deacon as a different yet complementary aspect of ordained ministry within the historic three-fold order of the Church. (*The Deacon's Ministry*, ed. Christine Hall, Gracewing, 1991, p. xiii)

9.3 *Lumen Gentium*, one of the most significant documents to emerge from the Second Vatican Council, acknowledged the shortcomings of the transitional model of the diaconate and looked forward to the restoration of a permanent diaconate. "It pertains to the territorial bodies of bishops...to decide, with the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, whether and where it is opportune for such deacons to be appointed." (*Lumen Gentium* 29). It is estimated that there are now about 15,000 permanent Roman Catholic deacons worldwide, all of whom are men, including 300 in the United Kingdom.

9.4 Many Churches of the Anglican Communion have in recent years been involved in deliberations about the ordination of women to the priesthood, and these deliberations have to some extent overshadowed consideration of the diaconate. Nevertheless, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America has approximately 1400 permanent deacons, most of whom are non-stipendiary. The Church of England continues to have transitional deacons (male) and semi-permanent deacons, women who wish eventually to be ordained to the priesthood but who cannot yet be so ordained, though the decision of the General Synod in November 1992 was a step towards the removal of this category of deacons. There is, however, within the Church of England a vigorous movement in favour of a permanent diaconate, and there are over 30 permanent male deacons and about 100 female deacons who do not intend to seek ordination to the priesthood.

9.5 Some united or uniting churches have permanent diaconates. The Uniting Church in Australia and the United Church of Canada are examples. In Britain, the United Reformed Church, when it came into being in 1972, inherited 'elders' from the Presbyterian tradition and 'deacons' from the Congregational tradition; thereafter they have all been known as 'elders'. Those who had been deaconesses in the Presbyterian Church of England continued to serve, though no further recruitment took place and there are no longer any active deaconesses in the United

Reformed Church. Church Related Community Workers, who are not ordained, exercise diaconal functions: at present there are fourteen of them in the United Reformed Church.

9.6 The Church of Sweden, like the British Methodist Church, has a permanent diaconate which is quite distinct from the presbyterate. In other words, those to be ordained presbyters are not first ordained to the diaconate.

9.7 Within the Orthodox Churches there are both transitional and permanent deacons and though the former are in the majority, there appears to be renewed interest both in the place of women within the diaconate and in the extension of the permanent diaconate. The Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation held in Rhodes in 1988, which brought together official representatives of all the Orthodox Churches, declared:

The apostolic order of deaconesses should be revived. It was never altogether abandoned in the Orthodox Church though it has tended to fall into disuse . . . Such a revival would represent a positive response to many of the needs and demands of the contemporary world in many spheres. This would be all the more true if the Diaconate in general (male as well as female) were restored in all places in its original, manifold services (diakonai) . . . It should not be solely restricted to a purely liturgical role or considered to be a mere step on the way to higher 'ranks' of clergy. (Quoted in Hall, op.cit., pp.191f)

9.8 The United Methodist Church in the United States of America and elsewhere has transitional deacons, though in recent years the possibility of abandoning this practice in favour of the establishment of a permanent diaconate has been under review. At the General Conference in 1992, a proposal to this effect was very narrowly defeated.

9.9 The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas at the time of writing has provisional legislation before its synods to amend the Deed of Church Order with regard to both presbyteral and diaconal ministry. Of particular relevance to our present concerns is the proposed clause:

There shall be two orders of ministry in full connexion with the Church, viz. Presbyters who shall be set apart for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and Deacons who shall likewise be set apart for other spheres of Christian Service as the Conference may determine.

9.10 At a consultation of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 'Towards a Distinctive Diaconate', held in Perth in May 1992, the Bishop of Brechin is reported to have said that

the revival of the diaconate is emphatically not a way of shunting up a siding the question of the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate, but is a trans-denominational and international phenomenon which . . . does not go away when women are admitted to the presbyterate. (Quoted in *Distinctive Diaconate News*, October 1992)

The fact that British Methodism is considering theological and constitutional issues regarding the Methodist Diaconal Order at a time when so much attention is being paid to the diaconate in many churches of widely varying traditions throughout the world may be seen as one manifestation of that 'trans-denominational and international phenomenon' to which the Bishop referred.

10. Theological Issues

10.1 In this section we seek to express a theological understanding of the diaconate in Methodism. Previous Methodist writings on the subject provide little direct help. *Ordination in the Methodist Church*, adopted by the Conference of 1960, claims that

the Reformation Office of 'deacon', closely corresponding to the New Testament 'diaconos', is held among us by the various kinds of 'stewards', who are called to perform their stewardship to the glory of God and the building up of the Church. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983*, pp.127f).

It may seem strange to us that the report makes no reference to the Wesley Deaconess Order, but sees diaconal ministry simply in terms of the ministry exercised by various kinds of stewards. We may also be rather less confident about the 'close correspondence' between the New Testament deacon and the Reformation office of that name, since our knowledge about the former is so limited. It is, of course, true that stewards share in diaconal ministry, as does the whole Church, but diaconal ministry in Methodism is also exercised by others, not least by those who are ordained to the diaconate.

10.2 The Statement on Ordination, adopted by the Conference of 1974, was largely, though not exclusively, concerned with presbyteral ministry. The section on the diaconate was rather tentative about the continuing role of the diaconal ministry, reflecting the general uncertainty that prevailed at that time. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983*, pp.144-146).

10.3 More helpful is the report, *The Ministry of the People of God*, adopted by the Conference of 1988, which includes in paragraph 088 the following sentence about the Methodist Diaconal Order:

... three factors – ordination, life-long commitment and availability for stationing – indicate a parallel with the ordained ministry, from which it will be distinguished by being diaconal rather than presbyteral. (*Agenda 1988*, p.851)

10.4 It is, however, not immediately obvious what is distinctive about diaconal ministry, as an Anglican writer, Dr Robert Hannaford, admits:

There is a sense, of course, in which the sacred ministry as a whole and indeed the entire Church must be diaconal in character if it is to serve as a sign of Christ... What room can there be then for a separate diaconal order? We must tread carefully, for in maintaining the distinctiveness of the diaconal order we do not want to appropriate

exclusively for it what belongs to the Church as a whole. (in Hall, op.cit., p.31)

Words of caution were also included in the British Methodist Conference's response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

. . . we take very seriously the concern that a separate diaconate might lead to a devaluation of the ministry of the laity. (*Agenda, 1984, p.573*).

10.5 Certainly, any account of ministry which depends upon an analysis of functions to be performed would be hard pressed to find anything distinctive about the diaconate. In a Methodist context, there is nothing that deacons and deaconesses do that cannot be done by a presbyter or (at least in an emergency) by a lay person. Presbyteral ministry includes elements of service (diakonia) as does the ministry of the whole people of God. But a purely functional view of diaconal ministry is, in the end, as unsatisfactory as a purely functional view of presbyteral ministry. The three important features of both diaconal and presbyteral ministry identified in "The Ministry of the People of God" are much more concerned with *being* than with *doing*. A person *is* ordained; *is* committed for life; *is* available for stationing.

10.6 The Statement on Ordination, adopted by the Conference of 1974, was, as we observed in 10.2 above, largely concerned with presbyteral ministry. It does, however, adopt a position on the meaning of ordained ministry which is as relevant to diaconal ministry as to presbyteral. This may be called the 'representative' view of ordained ministry.

10.7 The Statement rejects an entirely functional view of ministry.

Unquestionably there are functions to fulfil, associated by long tradition with the ordained ministry and written into the ordination service....But it would be inadequate to confine the special calling to a collection of functions. For one thing, they are largely shared with people who are not ordained... For another, some ordained ministers are not in a position to carry out all the functions, but their ordination is not questioned on that account. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983, p.135*)

10.8 The Statement continues:

To find a further category, we go back to the rediscovery of the significance of the whole people of God . . . They are called, all of them, ordained and unordained, to be the Body of Christ to men. But as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focussed and represented and it is their responsibility to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world. (pp.135f)

- 10.9 It is worth noting that the Anglican, Hannaford, makes extensive use of the concepts “focus” and “representation” when he offers a theology of the diaconate; for example, he writes: “the deacon represents the Church’s identification with the servant ministry of Christ . . .” and “the diaconate focuses in a particularly sharp way the question of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom.” (Hall, op.cit., pp.36, 35).
- 10.10 We have already observed in section 9 the widespread renewal of diaconal ministry in many parts of the Church. It is also worth noting that though these renewed diaconates take a variety of forms, there is often a good deal of common ground in the various Churches’ theological understandings of the diaconate. We offer four examples:

First, from the United Methodist Church’s ordination service for deacons:

My sisters and brothers,
 every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ
 in a ministry of service to the world . . .
 God has called you to a special ministry
 that will exemplify this servanthood
 in the Church and in the world.
 In the name of Jesus Christ
 you are to serve all people.
 You are to represent to the Church
 the ministry of servanthood in the world . . .

Will you, in the exercise of your ministry,
 represent to the People of God
 their own responsibility to serve others?

Second, from the Roman Catholic Church:

At the turn of the first century the martyr bishop St Ignatius of Antioch described it (the diaconate) as nothing less than ‘the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve’(Ad Magnesios,VI,I). The diaconate can thus be seen as a sacramental sign of the character of the Church as servant. (*Permanent Diaconate*, the Bishops’ Conference of Great Britain, published in *Briefing*, 1987, p.424)

Third, from the Church of Sweden:

The special task of the diaconate is underlined in the Order for Ordination of 1987: with Christ as example, to “be a sign of mercy in the congregation and society...When the ministry of the deacon is renewed in our own time its commission is the ancient one: not to free fellow-Christians from but to inspire and strengthen them to be sensitive as fellow human beings and untiring in serving others.(*Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, The Bishops’ Conference, Uppsala, 1990, English translation, p.33)

Fourth, from the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission:

Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life...They exercise a ministry of love within the community. (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, paragraph 31)

- 10.11 It would be foolish to believe that the definitive statement on the meaning of diaconal ministry, or presbyteral ministry, or the ministry of the whole Church, has yet been written or will ever be written. All such statements are provisional and the Church's understanding is constantly being enriched. Nevertheless, theological reflection, employing the concepts of representation and focus which have been a feature of recent thinking, and Methodism's own experience of diaconal ministry suggest that the ministry offered by deacons and deaconesses, though functionally similar to the discipleship expressed by all members of the Body of Christ, is distinctive in the following ways:
- 10.12 **Deacons and deaconesses are a 'focus' for the servant ministry of Christ; through their ministry of caring, the incarnate servant Christ is revealed. They are a 'focus' for the servant ministry of the Church, making visible God's calling to the Church to be a servant in the world. Their servant ministry challenges the Church to respond to this calling. Part of their role is to interpret to the Church the needs and aspirations of the world. Deacons and deaconesses offer Methodism and the wider Church the discipline, spirituality and commitment to community that is part of working out their personal vocation in the context of being a religious order.**
- 10.13 None of this need detract from the ministry of the whole people of God; indeed, it has been argued above that diaconal ministry as a focus and representation of the servant ministry of the whole Church is a means of enabling and enriching that total ministry. It should, however, be emphasised that all specific ministries are rooted first in the total ministry of Christ himself and second in the ministry of the people of God. Diaconal ministry particularly focuses the servant ministry of Christ and the Church just as presbyteral ministry particularly focuses the priestly and prophetic ministry of Christ and the Church.
- 10.14 We turn now to two further issues. The first is the liturgical role of members of the diaconate. As we have seen (3.5 and 4.1 above) the liturgical functions of deacons sometimes overshadowed their work of service. In some churches where the permanent diaconate has been revived the liturgical role of the deacon has been emphasised as well as the model of servant. In Methodism, it has not been necessary for members of the Wesley Deaconess Order or of the Methodist Diaconal Order to be leaders of worship, though many are in fact local preachers. The ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (see 10.10 above) refers to the inter-dependence of worship and service, however, and it may be that, as the ministry of Methodist deaconesses and deacons

further develops, new insights may be gained into appropriate ways of diaconal involvement in the Church's worship.

- 10.15 Second, in this report there has been reference both to "orders of ministry" and to "religious orders". It is possible to distinguish between the two, though they are not mutually exclusive. A person may be a member of an order of ministry and of a religious order, though equally a person may be a member of one without being a member of the other.
- 10.16 Throughout most of Christian history, and in most branches of the Church, one, two or three "major" orders of ministry have been recognized. Ordination, by the laying-on of hands and prayer, has been the means by which a person has been deemed to have been admitted into an order of ministry, though sometimes different terms have been used, such as "consecration" for bishops. Once ordained, a person *is* a minister (deacon, presbyter, bishop). Although he or she may be debarred from acting as such under the Church's discipline, the reality of the ordination or its permanence is not in doubt; and if subsequently such a person is permitted to exercise ministry again, no further ordination takes place. Ordination has been regarded as being for life; and indeed in churches with a three-fold order of ministry, subsequent ordination to another order of ministry is not regarded as obliterating earlier ordinations: the presbyter is both presbyter and deacon; the bishop is bishop, presbyter and deacon.
- 10.17 Orders of ministry have traditionally been deeply involved in the day-to-day life and the organization and government of the institutional Church. In Methodism ministers (presbyters) have been responsible for a good deal of Church government, through the Ministerial sessions of the Synod and the Conference and through the Representative sessions, where, in the case of the Conference, they constitute half the membership.
- 10.18 Religious orders and orders of ministry sometimes, but not always, have characteristics in common. The members of religious orders may be ordained, but in some orders need not be: many religious communities include lay brothers or sisters alongside the ordained. Although some religious orders have been conspicuous in Church government, others have not. Members of religious orders have generally had a very strong sense of loyalty to those orders and a strong sense of unity and fellowship within them. For most of its history, the Wesley Deaconess Order exhibited the marks of a religious order. Its members felt much more closely bound together than has been the case with presbyteral ministers. Convocation, not the Conference, was the setting for ordination, and loomed much larger in the life of most deaconesses than the Conference. Three factors that were important in the rise of the Wesley Deaconess Order contributed to the Order having the ethos of a religious order; namely, (i) the vigour of voluntary associations and city missions in concern for the poor; (ii) the influence of the monastic ideal via the Oxford Movement – an ideal not dissonant with the disciplined, coordinated style of Methodist itinerant ministry; and (iii) the social context of women's ministry in the nineteenth century Church.

- 10.19 It is worthy of attention that, as the deacon's liturgical role became increasingly important in the middle ages, the charitable work of religious orders blossomed; and that, in the nineteenth century, voluntary associations and new diaconal orders sprang up to meet the needs that Protestant churches had not been meeting through the diaconate. (See 6.2 above.) This suggests that the servant ministry of Christ finds forms of expression that have not always been formally recognized as diaconal but which compensate for changes and limitations in the Church's ministry. Waves of renewal in the formal diaconate, at the Reformation, in the nineteenth century and at the present time, may be seen as responses to the leading of the Spirit which re-focus identification with the servant ministry of Christ.
- 10.20 Members of the Methodist Diaconal Order still preserve many characteristics and self-perceptions of a religious order, and yet are increasingly perceiving themselves, and being perceived by others, also as members of an order of ministry. Their Ordination Service undoubtedly uses language that is appropriate to an order of ministry, and takes place during the Conference rather than at Convocation. It also includes elements of admission and welcome into full membership of a religious order.
- 10.21 There is reason to believe that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both an order of ministry and a religious order, in which the servant ministry of Christ to the world is focused and represented, and indeed that this is not a new phenomenon. It was true of the Wesley Deaconess Order, though not always recognized or explicitly stated. The existence in Methodism of that which is both an order of ministry and a religious order should be acknowledged and welcomed as a significant contribution not only to Methodist life but also to the developing ecumenical understanding of diaconal ministry.

11. Constitutional Issues

- 11.1 If it is accepted that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both a religious order and an order of ministry and that therefore Methodism has in fact two orders of ministry rather than one, there are constitutional consequences. To agree that it is not appropriate to regard deaconesses and deacons as lay people, or to imply that there is only one form of ordained ministry, the presbyteral, means that what is said about ministry in the Doctrinal Clause, Clause 4 of the Deed of Union, needs attention.
- 11.2 The assumption in the Deed and throughout Standing Orders that there is only one order of ministry and that all Methodists except presbyteral ministers are lay people will need to be corrected. In the judgment of the Faith and Order Committee, the Doctrinal Clause, which seems to divide the Church into ministers (presbyters) and lay people, will need revision, a procedure which is possible though difficult. Though this is a daunting prospect, constitutional and legal formulations, important as they are in inhibiting rash and ill-considered change, should not be allowed to prevent the Church from expressing its developing understanding of ministry.

- 11.3 But how thoroughgoing a revision of Clause 4 is necessary to deal with this problem? It must be admitted that this clause, which has remained unaltered since Methodist Union, leaves unsaid much that Methodists today would wish to say about ministry, not least about the ministry of the whole people of God. But Clause 4 supplies, not a full doctrinal statement, but doctrinal standards by which doctrinal statements issued from time to time by the Conference are to be tested. Consequently many elements of Methodist doctrine receive no attention in Clause 4. As with the historic creeds only those points at which contentious views are to be excluded are mentioned. Provided that references to ‘ministers’ and ‘ministry’ in the doctrinal standards are understood to be references to presbyters and the presbyterate, and provided that the Clause is amended so as to remove the words ‘ministers and laymen’, which appear to exclude the diaconate, it does not greatly matter that there is no explicit reference in this context to the diaconate. It will, however, eventually be necessary to introduce new references to diaconal ministry in other parts of the Deed and in Standing Orders.
- 11.4 Moreover, Clause 4 is an historic document which could not be changed until 1976 and in fact has not been changed since then, and it does not seem advisable to seek to effect more than the bare minimum number of changes necessary to deal with the problem confronting us. The modest changes which are proposed in resolution 2 and which amount to the straight omission of three words and substitutions in the case of one word and one phrase, would not only address that problem but would also overcome two other difficulties which the Deed presents.
- 11.5 First, as well as appearing to exclude diaconal ministry, Clause 4 is the only part of the Deed of Union or of Standing Orders where non-inclusive language is perpetuated (“ministers and laymen”, paragraph 3; “of men”, paragraph 8). Second, the phrase “itinerant and lay” in paragraph 9 appears to exclude ministers in local and sector appointments
- 11.6 It is therefore proposed that three words be deleted from Clause 4 and that two substitutions be made. If this proposal finds favour, three difficulties with the Clause will have been resolved with minimal change to an historic text.
- 11.7 In 11.3 it was said that references to ‘ministers’ and ‘ministry’ in the doctrinal standards should be understood to be references to presbyters and the presbyterate. This, of course, is not intended to deny the ministry to which deaconesses and deacons are ordained or the ministry of the whole Church. It recognizes, however, that the word ‘minister’ is the one which springs most readily to Methodist lips to describe a presbyter. If the recommended changes to the Doctrinal Clause find favour, it will be desirable to modify the definition of ‘minister’ in Clause 1 (xix) of the Deed of Union (probably at the Conference of 1995) to read as follows:

‘minister’ when used in relation to the Methodist Church means a person ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments and admitted by the Conference into full connexion, or a person

recognised and regarded as such under the provisions contained in this Deed.

11.8 We turn now to the need for further constitutional changes. It is sometimes assumed that, once it is recognized that deacons and deaconesses belong to an order of ministry and are not, therefore, lay people but diaconal ministers, it will be right for them to be aligned with the presbyteral ministers for most if not all purposes. This does not necessarily follow. Each separate issue must be considered carefully.

11.9 For instance, is it the case that deacons and deaconesses should be members of the Ministerial Sessions of the Synods and the Conference? Much care must be exercised in discovering the attitude of the deaconesses and deacons themselves to such a development; but there is at least a case for regarding the Ministerial sessions as Presbyteral sessions (in some ways akin to the diaconal Convocation), where presbyteral ministers consult together about matters of common concern and discipline. On this basis, deacons and deaconesses would not need to attend such meetings.

11.10 The Representative Session of the Conference, however, is another matter. At present, members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who attend it do so as lay representatives. It would clearly be extraordinary and unjust to insist that the only members of the Conference should be presbyteral ministers and lay people, or, to put it the other way round, to make deacons and deaconesses the only body of people excluded from membership of the Conference. One possible way of dealing with this matter could be to set aside a certain number of Conference places for members of the Diaconal Order, presumably either by reducing the number of ministerial (presbyteral) representatives, or by reducing in equal numbers ministerial and lay representation. The latter would abandon the principle that the Conference consists in equal numbers of ministers (presbyters) and lay people. The former might be preferred inasmuch as it would preserve something of this principle by making the Conference consist of equal numbers of ministers (diaconal and presbyteral) and lay people. There could well be other and better ways of dealing with this matter. It needs to be settled eventually, as do other issues, such as the Presidency and the Vice-Presidency of the Conference, but it is mentioned now, without a recommended solution, as an indication of the sort of issue that needs to be addressed if the principal contention of this report is accepted. Much work remains to be done before firm proposals for changing the Deed of Union and Standing Orders can be brought to the Conference, other than the proposal for modest amendments to Clause 4 of the Deed.

12. Recommendations

12.1 The Faith and Order Committee and the other bodies involved in the preparation of this report recommend that the Conference should, by adopting resolution 1, express its concurrence with the main thesis of this report, namely that the Methodist Church recognizes and has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal.

- 12.2 Second, it is recommended that Clause 4 of the Deed of Union be amended so that it does not appear to suggest that all Methodists must be either laypersons or ministers (of the word and sacraments) and thereby to appear to exclude diaconal ministry.
- 12.3 Third, it is recommended that the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, be directed to consider what further constitutional changes to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders will be needed if resolution 2 is confirmed by the Conference of 1995, and to recommend amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

APPENDIX

Clause 4 of the Deed of Union is set out below. Italics indicate the words which resolution 2 below seeks to delete. The words proposed for substitution are printed in capital letters.

4 Doctrine The doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church are as follows:

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church *both ministers and laymen* are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.

The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.

Christ's ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have a principal and directing part in these great duties but they hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. These ministries are shared with them by others to whom also the Spirit divides his gifts severally as he wills.

It is in the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God who bestows the gift of the Spirit the grace and the fruit which indicate those whom He has chosen.

Those whom the Methodist Church recognises as called of God and therefore receives into its ministry shall be ordained by the imposition of hands as expressive of the Church's recognition of the minister's personal call.

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of *men* PERSONS but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised.

The preachers itinerant and lay ALL METHODIST PREACHERS are examined tested and approved before they are authorised to minister in holy things. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.

The Methodist Church recognises two sacraments namely baptism and the Lord's Supper as of divine appointment and of perpetual obligation of which it is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the Report.

The Conference amends Clause 4 of the Deed of Union as follows:

- (i) in the second substantive paragraph delete "both ministers and laymen";
- (ii) in the seventh paragraph for "men" substitute "persons";
- (iii) in the eighth paragraph for "The preachers itinerant and lay" substitute "All Methodist preachers".

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, to bring proposals for further changes to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

(Agenda 1993, pp.223-244)

THE METHODIST DIACONAL ORDER (1995)

Introduction

1. In 1993 the Conference adopted the report on the Methodist Diaconal Order, which had been prepared by the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee. The report was substantial – over 11,000 words – and cannot easily be summarized, though a brief indication of its contents will be given in the following paragraphs and a number of quotations from it appear in the present report.
2. The 1993 report was occasioned by resolutions of the Conferences of 1988 and 1989. The fundamental issue was the adoption in 1988 of the resolution:

The Conference resolves that the members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who are received into full membership of the Order shall be ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God . . .

because the words ‘ordained to the diaconate in the Church of God’ suggest that deacons and deaconesses belong to an ‘order of ministry’ – the diaconate – whereas the Deed of Union appears to recognize explicitly only one order of ministry, the presbyteral; from a constitutional point of view deacons and deaconesses are regarded as lay people. The report therefore addressed the theological question as to whether or not the diaconate should be regarded as an order of ministry and the constitutional question as to whether the Deed of Union required amendment in consequence.

3. The table of contents of the 1993 report gives some indication of the thoroughness with which these issues were addressed:

Introduction
The New Testament and ‘Deacons’
The Diaconate in the Early Church
The Diaconate in the Medieval West
The Reformation and the Diaconate
The Diaconate in Protestantism to the Nineteenth Century
The Diaconate in British Methodism to 1978
The Methodist Diaconal Order
Ecumenical Perspectives
Theological Perspectives
Constitutional Issues
Recommendations

4. After extensive examination of the history of the diaconate, of current ecumenical perspectives and of the theology of diaconal ministry, the report reached the following conclusion:

There is reason to believe that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both an order of ministry and a religious order, in which the servant ministry of Christ to the world is focused and represented, and indeed that this is not a

new phenomenon. It was true of the Wesley Deaconess Order, though not always recognized or explicitly stated. The existence in Methodism of that which is both an order of ministry and a religious order should be acknowledged and welcomed as a significant contribution not only to Methodist life but also to the developing ecumenical understanding of diaconal ministry.

5. These recommendations followed:

The Faith and Order Committee and the other bodies involved in the preparation of this report recommend that the Conference should, by adopting resolution A1, express its concurrence with the main thesis of this report, namely that the Methodist Church recognizes and has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal.

Second, it is recommended that Clause 4 of the Deed of Union be amended so that it does not appear to suggest that all Methodists must be either laypersons or ministers (of the word and sacraments) and thereby to appear to exclude diaconal ministry.

Third, it is recommended that the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, be directed to consider what further constitutional changes to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders will be needed if resolution 2 is confirmed by the Conference of 1995, and to recommend amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

6. The 1993 Conference adopted these resolutions:

A1 The Conference adopts the Report.

A2 The Conference amends Clause 4 of the Deed of Union as follows:

- (i) in the second substantive paragraph delete 'both ministers and laymen';
- (ii) in the seventh paragraph for 'men' substitute 'persons';
- (iii) in the eighth paragraph for 'The preachers itinerant and lay' substitute 'All Methodist preachers'.

A3 The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and the Law and Polity Committee, to bring proposals for further changes to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders to the Conferences of 1995 and 1996 respectively.

The Deferred Special Resolution

7. The adoption of Resolution A2 set in motion the long and complex process by which proposed amendments to the Doctrinal Standards Clause of the Deed of Union must be referred to District Synods, Circuit Meetings and Church Councils. The final decision on the 'Deferred Special Resolution' will be taken by the Conference of 1995. If the amendments it proposes are confirmed, they will not, in themselves, cause the Deed of Union explicitly to recognize the Methodist Diaconal Order as an order of ministry; but the

amended Doctrinal Clause will no longer preclude that recognition. As Resolution A3 indicated, further amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders will be required.

An Order of Ministry

8. There is some evidence to suggest that, in discussions of the Deferred Special Resolution, the term 'order of ministry', as used in the 1993 report, has caused confusion and uncertainty. Though the report speaks of two parallel, complementary and distinctive orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal, some people have argued that Methodism has no orders of ministry at all and that the Deed of Union precludes such orders. The Faith and Order Committee believes this argument to be mistaken.
9. Clause 4 of the Deed of Union states that:

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of men.

In the judgement of the Faith and Order Committee, the intention of this sentence is to refute the idea of an **exclusive priesthood** which belongs to one order or class, rather than to deny the **existence** of any orders or classes.

10. It is important that there should be no misunderstanding of what Methodism means by the 'priesthood of all believers' or of the place of ordained persons within it. As the Faith and Order Committee's report, *Called to Love and Praise*, which can be found in Volume 1 of the 1995 Conference Agenda, says:

The early Christian communities had no separated and distinctive priesthood. Christ alone was High Priest, the mediator between God and humankind (Hebrews 9:1-2). The whole Church was 'priestly', continuing the ministry of Israel and her Messiah (1 Peter 2:9), but no one was ever called a priest in the sense of offering a cultic sacrifice. The old cultic language was transferred to the community and to daily life: a local church could be called 'the temple of God' (1 Corinthians 3:16), and the self-offering of Christians to God was their 'sacrifice' (Romans 12:1-2). . . . It will be seen that the New Testament directs us to the priesthood of the body of believers, rather than the priesthood of every believer. This latter emphasis is not necessarily wrong, but it is much more individual-centred than the language of Scripture, which stresses the inter-dependence of believers.

The Statement, *Ordination in the Methodist Church*, adopted by the Conference of 1960, makes it clear that

the doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers' is that we share, as believers, in the priesthood of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself . . . Into that priesthood of Christ we are taken up by faith, and we in our turn, and in self-identification with Him, offer ourselves in utter humility and obedience as a living sacrifice to God. We are 'priests unto God', and therefore 'take upon ourselves with joy the yoke of obedience', as we are enjoined in the Covenant Service. So the doctrine does not mean that every Christian has the right to exercise every function and administer both

sacraments. For it is not an assertion of claims, but a declaration of our total obedience. A Methodist Minister is a priest, in company with all Christ's faithful people; but not all priests are Ministers. (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1933-1983*, p.130)

11. The 1960 Statement thus recognizes that within the ministry of all God's people, God calls some men and women to specific ministries. Though all Christ's faithful people are priests, 'not all priests are Ministers'. There is a body of people known as 'Ministers' and, in the Methodist Church, their call has been tested, they have been admitted into full connexion with the Conference, and they have been ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.
12. It is in this sense that it is proper to talk about 'orders of ministry'. An order of ministry is that to which those ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands for a specified ministry (for example, that of the Word and Sacraments) belong. To suggest that Methodism recognizes no orders of ministry is quite wrong: for example, the Ordination Service (of ministers of the Word and Sacraments) authorized by the Conference of 1974 includes these words, spoken by the President (or the President's deputy):

. . . these are the persons whom we intend, in God's name, to ordain to the Ministry of his Church in the Order of Presbyters. (*Methodist Service Book*, p. G7)
13. It is therefore beyond dispute that Methodism has at least one order of ministry – the order of presbyters, ministers of the Word and Sacraments. The main thesis of the 1993 report on the Methodist Diaconal Order was that, in fact, the Methodist Church has **two** orders of ministry – the presbyteral and the diaconal. The two are separate and distinct, though complementary. Each is rooted in the ministry of Christ himself and each exists within the total ministry of the whole Church.

Outstanding Issues

14. The following paragraphs are quoted from the 1993 report:

If it is accepted that the Methodist Diaconal Order is both a religious order and an order of ministry and that therefore Methodism has in fact two orders of ministry rather than one, there are constitutional consequences. To agree that it is not appropriate to regard deaconesses and deacons as lay people, or to imply that there is only one form of ordained ministry, the presbyteral, means that what is said about ministry in the Doctrinal Clause, Clause 4 of the Deed of Union, needs attention. (11.1)

It is therefore proposed that three words be deleted from Clause 4 and that two substitutions be made. If this proposal finds favour, three difficulties with the Clause will have been resolved with minimal change to an historic text. (11.6)

In 11.3 it was said that references to 'ministers' and 'ministry' in the doctrinal standards should be understood to be references to presbyters and the presbyterate. This, of course, is not intended to deny the ministry to which deaconesses and deacons are ordained or the ministry of the whole

Church. It recognizes, however, that the word 'minister' is the one which springs most readily to Methodist lips to describe a presbyter. If the recommended changes to the Doctrinal Clause find favour, it will be desirable to modify the definition of 'minister' in Clause 1 (xix) of the Deed of Union (probably at the Conference of 1995) to read as follows:

'minister' when used in relation to the Methodist Church means a person ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments and admitted by the Conference into full connexion, or a person recognised and regarded as such under the provision contained in this Deed. (11.7)

We turn now to the need for further constitutional changes. It is sometimes assumed that, once it is recognized that deacons and deaconesses belong to an order of ministry and are not, therefore, lay people but diaconal ministers, it will be right for them to be aligned with the presbyteral ministers for most if not all purposes. This does not necessarily follow. Each separate issue must be considered carefully. (11.8)

For instance, is it the case that deacons and deaconesses should be members of the Ministerial Sessions of the Synods and the Conference? Much care must be exercised in discovering the attitude of the deaconesses and deacons themselves to such a development; but there is at least a case for regarding the Ministerial sessions as Presbyteral sessions (in some ways akin to the diaconal Convocation), where presbyteral ministers consult together about matters of common concern and discipline. On this basis, deacons and deaconesses would not need to attend such meetings. (11.9)

The Representative Session of the Conference, however, is another matter. At present, members of the Methodist Diaconal Order who attend it do so as lay representatives. It would clearly be extraordinary and unjust to insist that the only members of the Conference should be presbyteral ministers and lay people, or, to put it the other way round, to make deacons and deaconesses the only body of people excluded from membership of the Conference. One possible way of dealing with this matter could be to set aside a certain number of Conference places for members of the Diaconal Order, presumably either by reducing the number of ministerial (presbyteral) representatives, or by reducing in equal numbers ministerial and lay representation. The latter would abandon the principle that the Conference consists in equal number of ministers (presbyters) and lay people. The former might be preferred inasmuch as it would preserve something of this principle by making the Conference consist of equal numbers of ministers (diaconal and presbyteral) and lay people. There could well be other and better ways of dealing with this matter. It needs to be settled eventually, as do other issues, such as the Presidency and the Vice-Presidency of the Conference, but it is mentioned now, without a recommended solution, as an indication of the sort of issue that needs to be addressed if the principal contention of this report is accepted. (11.10)

15. The working party appointed by the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Division of Ministries, the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Law and Polity Committee, has now identified several places in the Deed of Union and Standing Orders where changes will in due course be required if

the Deferred Special Resolution is confirmed. The working party presented a report to the Faith and Order Committee in March 1995, but the Committee found it impossible to come to a mind on some of the issues raised and is not therefore in a position to make firm recommendations to the Conference for further amendments to the Deed of Union.

16. Indeed, the Committee has come to believe that most of the matters on which the Committee itself is divided raise issues which need to be addressed by the Methodist Council. The reason for this is that the matters concerned are almost all associated with the Conference itself (see paragraphs 18 and 24 below) and other working parties have reported or are to report to the Council on related matters. Indeed the issues raise profound question about our polity which require discussion throughout the Church. The Committee therefore recommends that the Conference should direct the Methodist Council to bring further reports to the Conference. The Committee believes, however, that the Conference should know what issues remain to be resolved and suggests that the following matters will be prominent among those which require attention.

Definitions

17. It is desirable that clause 1 (xix) of the Deed of Union be amended so as to provide the definition of 'minister' suggested in the 1993 report and that a new clause 1 (xiA), defining 'deacon or deaconess', be introduced. Clause 1 (xxviii), defining 'probationer' will also need amendment.

The Ministerial and Representative Sessions of the Synods and the Conference

18. As paragraph 11.9 of the 1993 report noted, it is necessary to decide whether the Ministerial Sessions of the Synods and the Conference should remain 'presbyteral' sessions, of which deacons and deaconesses are not members, or whether deacons and deaconesses should be members of one or both of these Sessions. The joint working party was of the opinion that the Ministerial Sessions of the Synods and of the Conference should remain 'presbyteral'. Most, though not all members of the Faith and Order Committee agreed that the Ministerial Session of the Conference should remain 'presbyteral' and that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order should be seen as a broadly equivalent assembly for deacons and deaconesses. The Faith and Order Committee was not persuaded that there was a strong case for keeping Ministerial Synods exclusively presbyteral, or that there must be consistency in this respect between the Synods and the Conference.
19. With regard to the Representative Session of the Synods, the Methodist Diaconal Order believes it to be desirable that in due course Standing Orders be amended in order that attendance at these Sessions should be a matter of obligation and discipline for deaconesses and deacons as it is for presbyters. If deaconesses and deacons were to become members of the Ministerial Synods (see 18 above), the matter of discipline would also apply in that regard.
20. As the 1993 report indicated, the issue of diaconal membership of the Representative Session of the Conference is extremely difficult to resolve. The working party proposed to the Faith and Order Committee that deacons and deaconesses who attend the Representative Session should do so as 'ordained' rather than 'lay' representatives. In other words, the Conference

should consist of a specified number of lay members and an equal number of people, prescribed by Standing Orders, of ministers, deacons and deaconesses. Synods would be free to appoint to their allocated 'ordained' seats whatever combination of deacons, deaconesses and presbyters they wish. Clause 14 (1) and (6) of the Deed of Union would require amendment if this were to happen.

21. A similar principle might obtain in respect of Conference Elected Representatives (Clause 14 (5)) and representatives of Connexional bodies (Standing Order 102).
22. Clause 24 (i), which deals with the reconvening of the Ministerial Session, would then need minor amendment.
23. Clause 14 (4)(a) deals with representation from other autonomous Conferences. This issue is currently being considered by other connexional committees.

The Vice Presidency

24. The future nature and role of the Senior Officers of the Conference is under consideration by the Methodist Council. The Faith and Order Committee found it impossible to come to a mind about the way in which members of the diaconate might hold such office. One possibility, preferred by the working party, would be for the office of Vice President of the Conference to be open to deaconesses and deacons as well as to lay people. In that case, Clause 27 of the Deed of Union would require amendment so as to read 'lay member, deaconess or deacon' instead of simply 'lay member'. If, however, the Vice Presidency is judged to be a lay office (as distinct from a non-presbyteral office), this would be inappropriate. Another possibility would be a redefined Presidency to be open to presbyters or deacons (or lay people?). Another course would be the creation of a new senior office, alongside the Presidency (held by a presbyter) and the Vice Presidency (a lay office), which would be for deacons or deaconess only. A fourth possibility would be to retain a presbyteral Presidency and lay Vice Presidency and to make deacons and deaconesses ineligible for either office. Though this possibility has to be mentioned, the working party and the majority of the Faith and Order Committee regard it as unjust that any body of people within the Church should be excluded from holding one of the Senior Offices of the Conference.

Candidature, Stationing and Membership

25. It has been suggested by some correspondents that issues of candidature, stationing and membership also need to be addressed. Such matters are under review within the Division of Ministries and within the Methodist Diaconal Order itself, and it will be appropriate for the Methodist Council to confer with those bodies in due course.

The Working Party

26. The Faith and Order Committee expressed its gratitude to the members of the joint working party which has addressed these issues since 1989 and which was largely responsible for the writing of the 1993 report and the identification of the issues which underlie the present report. The members of the working

party were Sister Diane Clutterbuck, Dr Susan Hardman Moore (to 1994), Mrs Susan Howdle, the Revd John Job, Sister Jane Middleton (from 1993), the Revd Dr John Taylor, the Revd Brian Tebbutt, Sister Christine Walters and the Revd Neil Dixon (convener).

Recommendations

27. The Faith and Order Committee believes that the main thesis of the 1993 report, namely that the Methodist Church recognizes and has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal, is of crucial importance as consideration continues to be given to constitutional amendments related to the ministry of deacons and deaconesses. Provided that the Deferred Special Resolution is confirmed, the Committee recommends that the Conference, by adopting resolution J2 below, re-affirms the judgement of the 1993 Conference in this matter.
28. The Faith and Order Committee believes that the 1993 report and the present report provide a basis for study and discussion throughout the Connexion. It recommends that the Conference should encourage such study and discussion and should direct the Methodist Council to take whatever action may be appropriate to facilitate the process.
29. The Faith and Order Committee recommends that the ongoing responsibility for proposing amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders in respect of the Methodist Diaconal Order should pass from the Committee to the Methodist Council.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the report.

The Conference confirms the judgement of the 1993 Conference that the Methodist Church recognizes and has received from God two orders of ministry, the presbyteral and the diaconal.

The Conference encourages Districts, Circuits and Local Churches, carefully to consider the 1993 and 1995 reports on 'The Methodist Diaconal Order' and directs the Methodist Council to take whatever action may be appropriate to facilitate the process.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to bring further reports, including proposals for amendments to the Deed of Union and to Standing Orders, to the Conferences of 1996 and 1997.

(Agenda 1995, pp.713-721)

Before adopting the above resolutions, the Conference had previously confirmed the amendments to Clause 4 of the Deed of Union (see paragraphs 6 and 7 above).

THE DIACONATE (1997)

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The task engaging the Council's working party is to ensure that the Church's procedures and practices properly reflect the fact that the Methodist Diaconal Order is an acknowledged order of ministry, alongside the presbyteral order. Although clause 4 of the Deed of Union was recently changed so that those who are not presbyteral ministers are no longer necessarily regarded as lay, nevertheless most of our legislation and the practices it regulates still reflect that earlier assumption and need updating.
- 1.2 The working party has consistently been guided by the belief that Methodism regards lay, diaconal and presbyteral ministries as having different identities and emphases but equal value. Diaconal ministry within Methodism is neither of lower nor of higher status than presbyteral ministry. Nor is its nature such that deacons and deaconesses should be excluded from any sphere of ministry which may properly be exercised by both presbyters and lay people. Provision has therefore to be made for deaconesses and deacons to serve on committees, hold senior office, be members of the Conference, preach, and so on.
- 1.3 In each area where the Church has evolved legislation in relation to ministers the working party has examined its applicability to deaconesses and deacons, believing that as a rule parity of treatment is appropriate and that this should be made explicit. So, for example, procedures for candidature, training and probation, full connexion and ordination, stationing, discipline, superannuating, movement between the two orders and transfers from the orders of other Churches, ought to meet the same standard and be broadly similar.
- 1.4 At the same time there are areas of the life of the Methodist Church where the distinctive features of diaconal and presbyteral ministry require something other than a grouping together of the two orders. Thus we consider that there should be separate Ministerial (i.e. presbyteral – see below) and Diaconal Sessions of the Conference and that ministerial Synods and the diaconal Convocation should retain their exclusivity.
- 1.5 **The main recommendations will be found as bold text at two points within section 3: JUDGEMENT ON SOME KEY ISSUES (paragraphs 3.2.2 & 3.4.8), and as the bold sub-section headings in section 4: MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS.**

2. THE TASK OF THE WORKING PARTY

- 2.1 The Methodist Council established the working party following the 1995 Conference in order to explore the consequences of the Diaconal Order being an order of ministry. An interim report indicating the direction of thinking on major issues was received by the Conference in 1996.

- 2.2 At the same time a study guide “The Methodist Diaconal Order – An Order of Ministry” was published and sent to all ministers, deacons and deaconesses, as well as to members of the 1996 Conference. This has aided discussion of the issues throughout the Church in order to enable the Conference to consider the proposals enshrined in this report.
- 2.3 The necessary changes to the Deed of Union, if adopted, become special resolutions, to be confirmed in 1998, following appropriate consultation. The extensive changes to Standing Orders which will give effect to the proposals that follow will therefore be presented for adoption in 1998.
- 2.4 The members of the working party are: Rev Dr William R Davies (chair), Rev Eileen Appleyard, Rev Neil Dixon, Mrs Susan Howdle, Deaconess Kathleen Hutton, Rev Dr Stephen Mosedale (convenor), Mr Leon Murray, Mrs Sheila Russell, Deaconess Christine Walters, Rev Sandra Williams and Rev David Wood.

3 JUDGEMENT ON SOME KEY ISSUES

3.1 The Distinctive Role of the Diaconate

- 3.1.1 The detailed work on this theme which formed the report adopted by Conference in 1993 underlies all that follows in this report. We have noted that alongside the development of the Methodist Diaconal Order in recent years, diaconal ministry has been receiving renewed emphasis in many denominations. Despite widely different practices, there is a considerable agreement that the diaconate focuses and represents the servant role of the church in the world.
- 3.1.2 The Methodist Church believes that such diaconal ministry is different from, but neither inferior nor superior to, presbyteral ministry. The latter is a ministry of word and sacrament, pastoral care and oversight. Nor is either form of ordained ministry superior to the ministry of non-ordained members of the Church. We all share together in the ministry of the whole people of God.

3.2 The Diaconate as a Religious Order

- 3.2.1 The word “Order” in the title “Methodist Diaconal Order” (hereafter MDO), and in the previous “Wesley Deaconess Order” expresses the understanding that this is a religious Order. This report consistently uses “Order” with a capital to aid clarity as regards the distinction between a religious Order and an order of ministry. The MDO continues to explore its role and to develop its rule of life as such an Order; it does this with reference to the Religious Orders of other Churches.
- 3.2.2 The MDO would be strengthened as a religious Order if its rule of life were to be tested and endorsed by the Conference which is the supreme authority of the Methodist Church.** It is hoped that the current work within the Order might lead to the approval by Convocation of a new rule for adoption by the Conference in 1998.

- 3.2.3 We consider that such a rule, along with the provisions that will be included in our Constitutional Practice and Discipline (hereafter CPD) in order to implement this report, will give the Order clear boundaries within which to develop its life together, its styles of ministry, its mutual pastoral support, its patterns of prayer, and other ways in which it fulfils its servant calling.
- 3.2.4 In seeking to address sensitively this interface between being an order of the Church's ministry and being a religious Order, we are not unaware of some residual resistance to the recognition of the MDO as an order of ministry. Nevertheless we believe that Conference needs to hold to the courage of its repeated conviction, and that the Order will be strengthened as a result of its accountability to the Conference.

3.3 The Present Size of the Methodist Diaconal Order

- 3.3.1 At present there are around 220 ordained deaconesses and deacons, of whom about 80 are active. In addition there are around 40 students and probationers. There is every likelihood that the active membership of the Order will continue to grow by ten or more per year, and we are conscious that discussion is taking place within and beyond the Order regarding its optimum size.
- 3.3.2 Our proposals assume growth. At the present time there is a dearth of senior but still active members and some districts are devoid of active deacons and deaconesses. Some of our proposals, particularly as regards committee membership, need to be permissive of diaconal participation rather than directive at this time. We do not wish deaconesses and deacons to bear a disproportionate burden of district and connexional service, but as their number grows we consider that they need to be enabled to make their distinctive contribution in every arena of Church life and mission.

3.4 The Descriptions "Minister" and "Deacon"

- 3.4.1 We believe that the term "minister" should continue to be used to define ministers of the word and sacraments, that is presbyteral ministers, and that deacons and deaconesses should be the subject of a separate new definition in the Deed of Union.
- 3.4.2 As indicated above there is a sense in which all Christians are "ministers". But having acknowledged that there are two "orders of ministry" it might be thought not inappropriate to use the word "ministers" to encompass "presbyters, deacons and deaconesses". However, the common usage of the word "minister" is to describe a person ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament, that is a presbyter. This is the understanding inferred from the Deed of Union and therefore is the meaning to be read into every present reference to "minister" in CPD.
- 3.4.3 Even if the Church were to decide to replace every such reference to "minister" by "presbyter", it would be thoroughly misleading thereafter to start using "minister" in the wider sense to include deaconesses and deacons. Moreover we consider that the distinctiveness of the two forms or ordained

ministry would be blurred by adoption of any composite term that embraced both.

- 3.4.4 We further recommend that the term “deacon” should then be used to describe both male and female members of the diaconal Order.
- 3.4.5 The MDO itself has not reached consensus over terminology that should be used of members of the Order, either descriptive or vocative. Some wish to be called “sister” or “brother” whilst others find these terms archaic. Some deaconesses would find it difficult to start to be called “deacon”.
- 3.4.6 Since gender distinction is not relevant to the calling as such we believe we should follow the lead of some other Churches in working towards the abandonment of the term “deaconess” when describing those ordained to diaconal ministry. Increasingly “deaconess” is a term used in other Churches for a woman in recognised but non-ordained service. Therefore we propose that we should use “deacon”, in parallel to our use of “minister” or “lay person”, to include both genders.
- 3.4.7 In view of the large amount of legislation that will need to be written or rewritten in order to implement the later recommendations of this report in acknowledging the order of diaconal ministry, and mindful that new ordination services and a new service book are about to be approved, we believe that now is the right time for Conference to endorse this step. This will obviate what would otherwise be very frequent use of such clumsy phrases as “deaconess or deacon” or “ministers, deacons and deaconesses”.
- 3.4.8 Whilst **we recommend that “deacons” become our official usage when speaking about all members of the Order**, we suggest that all existing individual deaconesses and deacons should have the freedom to continue to style themselves “deaconess”, “sister” or “brother” if they prefer.
- 3.4.9 It has then become our task to examine each reference to ministers in CPD, and to add reference to deacons, with or without adaptation, in those places where legislation or guidelines ought to include them.

3.5 Revising Part 7 of Standing Orders

- 3.5.1 The size of the task which the move to inclusivity entails is particularly evident from Book III, Part 7 of CPD. This consists of nine sections (70-78) covering ministers, running from candidature through to resignation and reinstatement, and a single section (79) covering all aspects of the Diaconal Order. We hoped it would not prove necessary to replicate all the ministerial procedures in the cause of achieving equivalence, but we were aware that many of the regulations concerning ministers needed in future to apply to deaconesses and deacons too.
- 3.5.2 It is proposed that the current provisions within section 79 which relate to the order of diaconal ministry should be incorporated into the appropriate places in sections 70-78, and that section 79 should in future only contain regulations which relate to the MDO as a religious Order. Sometimes in

those sections common to both orders the diaconal order will need separate Standing Orders from those for ministers; more often a clause will be adequate which makes explicit that a Standing Order written with ministers in mind is applicable as it stands, or with some proviso, for deacons.

4 MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 There should be a Diaconal Session of The Conference

- 4.1.1 The Conference has in the past rejected proposals that it should consist of a Representative Session only. We propose that since there is a Ministerial Session there should also be a Diaconal Session. To make deaconesses and deacons members of the Ministerial Session would blur the differences between the two orders of ministry in a way that neither would find helpful.
- 4.1.2 The business of the Diaconal Session would consist of matters relating to the diaconate in a comparable way to the business of the Ministerial Session in relation to ministers. Its agenda would thus include:
- Final decisions as to:
 - continuanace of students and probationers
 - disciplinary appeals
 - Recommendations as to:
 - the acceptance of candidates
 - ordination and admission to full connexion and to membership of the Order (and reinstatements and transfers)
 - permissions to become supernumerary
 - Reports as to:
 - deaths, and the approval of obituaries (which we consider should then be printed in the Minutes)
 - resignations
 - First reading of stations
 - Appointment of officers to serve the Diaconal Session.
- 4.1.3 The Session would also engage in conversation regarding the servant ministry of the Church, and might discuss any matter on the agenda of the Representative Session in order to forward its views.
- 4.1.4 In addition the Diaconal Session would have shared business with the Representative Session as regards:
- the continuance of a separate Diaconal Session
 - the procedures of the Diaconal Session
 - the continuance, composition, functions and procedures of Convocation
- 4.1.5 It is considered that half a day should at present prove adequate for diaconal business. It is suggested that the service of remembrance for ministers

should include deaconesses and deacons as well, and be held at the conclusion of the Ministerial Session, at say 12 noon on the Friday. The Diaconal Session would then begin after lunch and conclude early evening. This proposed timing might have implications for the timing and/or constitution of the stationing committee.

- 4.1.6 As with the other Sessions, the President would preside at the Diaconal Session, and the Session would be serviced by the Secretary of Conference. Other secretarial functions could be exercised by deacons and deaconesses. In view of the size of the Session (see next section) and the relative non-complexity of its business, it is not thought necessary for this Session to have either a business committee or a committee of reference.

4.2 The Minimum Diaconal Membership of The Conference should be Twenty One

- 4.2.1 We think that a smaller figure would make for a group too small to be considered a viable Session of the Conference. Assuming that the provisional resolutions to reduce the size of the Conference are confirmed, then with a Conference of 384 members, 21 represents about 5.5% of the total. With the presence of the President and Secretary this would bring the minimum size of the Session to twenty-three.
- 4.2.2 We propose that the Warden should be an ex officio member of the Conference (as having many similar functions to district chairmen). Moreover, the figure of 5.5% suggests that at least one of the eighteen Conference-elected members of the Conference should be diaconal. The mechanism should simply be that where there is no continuing deaconess or deacon in this category then the diaconal nominee securing the most votes be elected regardless of number of votes cast.
- 4.2.3 As regards those appointed to the Conference by the Methodist Council it is not felt appropriate to designate any seat as specifically reserved for a member of the Order.
- 4.2.4 The other nineteen reserved diaconal seats (i.e. apart from the Warden and a minimum of one Conference-elected) would be filled by election at the district synods. The allocation of diaconal seats to districts would be part of the overall allocation, but would be made according to a rota in view of there being fewer seats than districts, and an unequal distribution of diaconal appointments between the districts.
- 4.2.5 The figures of one Conference-elected and nineteen district-elected members are minima. There is no reason why additional deaconesses and deacons should not be elected (including from districts that have no safeguarded diaconal seat) within that portion of the representation which provisional resolutions propose should no longer be specified. The Conference as a whole would consist of 33.3% ministers, 33.3% lay, 5.5% deacon(esse)s, and the remainder (about 28%) would be a variable mix.

- 4.2.6 If a substitute diaconal representative is required prior to the commencement of the Conference and the relevant District (having limited diaconal personnel) is unable to appoint another deacon or deaconess, then the small size of the Diaconal Session would make it advisable that the seat should not remain empty. It is therefore considered necessary to devise a procedure whereby a general reserve list could be utilised.
- 4.2.7 Members of the Order who are not elected as district representatives would be able to attend the Diaconal Session at their own charges and with the permission of the Warden. They would be able to speak but not vote. Officers of the Order with particular briefs would also be present without vote to present the relevant business.
- 4.2.8 It is recognised that diaconal representation to autonomous Conferences has to be in accordance with their varying theological understanding and operated at their discretion. If the associate members sent to our Conference by autonomous churches happen to include ordained deacons or deaconesses these would be entitled to attend the Diaconal as well as the Representative Session. Irish Methodism has only lay diaconal persons, who would therefore attend the Representative Session only. The United Methodist Church regards its deacons as “clergy”, but we consider that they should attend our Diaconal Session rather than Ministerial Session.

4.3 The Vice-Presidency should be open to Deacons and Deaconesses

- 4.3.1 Various possibilities for inclusion of deaconesses and deacons in the senior offices of the Church were considered in the light of other discussions under the aegis of the Methodist Council. We concur with the recommendation regarding senior offices that there must be opportunity for deacons and deaconesses to hold such a post, and propose that the office of vice-president should be open to lay persons, deaconesses and deacons.

4.4 Convocation should perform for the Diaconal Order most functions which the Ministerial Synods provide for presbyters.

- 4.4.1 Convocation includes sessions for devotion, study, fellowship, and conversation on the work of God, according to Standing Order 793, and offers opportunity for reflection on vocation and on the nature of the MDO as a religious Order. Some specific functions and appointments are also assigned in the aforementioned Standing Order. There are some considerable similarities with the functions of ministerial Synods (Standing Order 481 and the Agenda in Part 10).
- 4.4.2 Without wishing to equate ministerial Synods with Convocation we believe that the latter can serve many purposes which for ministers would be handled by the former.

4.5 Deaconesses and Deacons should be Members of the District Synods

- 4.5.1 In view of the above recommendation, we do not believe that deacons and deaconesses should become members of ministerial Synods. This is both because of the function of Convocation and also because of the relationship between ministerial Synods and the Ministerial Session of the Conference.
- 4.5.2 We do however consider that as a matter of discipline deaconesses and deacons should attend the representative Synod of the district in which they are stationed, or reside.

4.6 Members of the Diaconate should not have Church Membership recorded Locally

- 4.6.1 There can be no case for treating deaconesses and deacons differently from ministers in this respect. Membership of both orders of ministry is recorded connexionally and listed annually in the “Minutes of Conference”. References in CPD which assume local membership of deacons and deaconesses should be adapted.

4.7 Deacons and Deaconesses who are Preachers should appear in the Local Preachers List on their Circuit Plan

- 4.7.1 Where deaconesses or deacons are local preachers (for not all are) their names should appear (with their dates of recognition) in the list of local preachers as evidence of their preaching status, even though they will also appear in the list of those stationed in the circuit. It may be noted from S.O.560 that membership of the local preacher’s meeting does not require a preacher to have local membership, so the previous proposal does not create any difficulty.
- 4.7.2 Deaconesses and deacons engage in accompanied self-appraisal and further training, and both should include, for those who are local preachers, review and development of their preaching ministry. There is therefore no need to treat continuing local preacher development as a separate matter from their overall continuing review and training.
- 4.7.3 Any decision of a discipline committee, an appeal committee or the Diaconal Session of the Conference, which results in a deacon or deaconess ceasing to be in full connexion and in membership of the Order should carry with it a recommendation as regards continuing status as a local preacher (and member of the Church). Similarly any recommendation as to reinstatement should include a recommendation as to whether local preaching status should also be resumed, it being understood that preaching is not an essential element of diaconal ministry and that reinstatement as a deaconess or deacon need not necessarily imply reinstatement as a preacher.
- 4.7.4 Under S.O.766A deacons of other Churches authorised to serve are authorised to preach. This does not imply that all Methodist deaconesses and deacons should be preachers, but is understood to refer to authorisation of those from Churches in which all deacons are authorised preachers.

4.8 Deacons and Deaconesses should be Received into Full Connexion

- 4.8.1 We believe that there should be parity as regards language and procedures for admission to the two orders of ministry. To that end diaconal probationers should be received into full connexion as well as ordained, and the ceremony on the Sunday afternoon of the Conference should be similar to that for ministers. Being in full connexion means that the ministry is anchored within the British Methodist Conference which authorises its exercise.
- 4.8.2 A deaconess's or deacon's membership of the Methodist Diaconal Order (as a religious Order) is an additional element, marked within the ordination liturgy but distinct from the laying on of hands with prayer. To admit a person into the membership of the Order is thus an act of the Conference. It is subsequently "reported" to the Order in Convocation that these members have been added to it, but the Conference decision to receive into full connexion is what constitutes their right to membership of the Order.
- 4.8.3 It is inherent to the ministry of a deaconess or deacon, not least when working in marginalised places, to belong to the kind of community which is the MDO. No candidate should therefore be ordained to diaconal ministry in Methodism, who will not gladly belong to the Order.

4.9 Stationing should be the responsibility of the Stationing Committee and with the President having the same powers as for ministers.

- 4.9.1 Stationing procedures for the two orders should be complementary at least at the conclusion of the process. The stationing committee should become formally responsible for diaconal stationing, a first reading of stations should take place at the Diaconal Session of the Conference, and the final reading of a combined set of stations at the Representative Session.
- 4.9.2 The receipt of resignations during the course of the year, and emergency stationing should become the responsibility of the President in consultation with the Warden. This power should be enshrined in the Deed of Union (see clause 29).
- 4.9.3 The stationing policy sub-committee should advise on policy and priorities concerning diaconal stationing. Both the Stationing Committee and the policy sub- committee require revised constitutions that include adequate diaconal membership. In the case of the Stationing Committee it is considered that the inclusion of the Warden or her/his representative is the appropriate provision.
- 4.9.4 Acceptance of the Stationing Review Group's Additional Proposal A ("Arranged Stationing") will bring the two orders closer together at the beginning of the process. We consider however that just as there are special procedures for stationing ministerial probationers and for priority appointments, so too should there be at the present time a special model within the overall orbit as regards diaconal stationing. There is a number of dimensions which differentiate diaconal and presbyteral appointments, such as the specialist nature of the appointments and varied housing needs. It

should therefore continue to be the Warden who is responsible for the arrangements, but in close consultation with chairmen to ensure that diaconal stationing is clearly part of the process of ensuring the best possible staff team for each circuit.

- 4.9.5 At present deacons and deaconesses are usually initially appointed for three years because this is often a more suitable time span for a diaconal project, than the five year norm for an initial appointment to settled pastoral presbyteral ministry. We do not believe that this divergence should cease, but the Standing Order which already allows for an appointment of less than three years should be modified to allow for longer terms up to five years in appropriate circumstances.
- 4.9.6 Extensions of initial appointments currently operate by a very similar mechanism to that for presbyters and we merely need to bring diaconal appointments within the Standing Orders that cover such matters as voting majorities. An extension must be in consultation with the Warden.
- 4.9.7 We consider it important to avoid the term “invitation” in speaking about diaconal appointments. The circuit is asked to confirm acceptance of a proposed appointee, but this is very different from the ministerial process. Similarly an extension needs to be called that and not a “renewal”.
- 4.9.8 Curtailments are currently handled by the Warden in consultation with the chairman of the district, whereas presbyters are dealt with by a district committee (S.O.544). The latter model ought to be adopted for deaconesses and deacons. When a circuit or a member of the Order wants a curtailment they should contact the chairman who will consult the Warden, then set up a committee if necessary and report the outcome to the Warden. The committee should be the same size as for presbyters (i.e. 6 persons) but should consist of two presbyters, two deacons or deaconesses (nominated by the Warden), and two laypersons (including the district lay representative to the Stationing Committee). We consider that the equivalent committee for the curtailment of presbyters should include “at least two ministers and at least two lay persons” among the six and thus provide the option for diaconal members.
- 4.9.9 We recommend that the regulation regarding resignations (S.O.786(7)) be amended so that notice is given not to the Warden but to the President, who shall notify the Warden, and thereafter follow the procedures for ministers except that final report would be to the Diaconal and Representative Sessions. Similar procedures to those for ministers, should apply as regards reinstatements; the Warden would of course be kept informed.

4.10 Diaconal Procedures for Candidature, Training and Probation, and Transfer from Other Denominations, should be written down and incorporated in Standing Orders

- 4.10.1 There is a huge disparity in the amount of existing legislation as between the diaconal and presbyteral orders in these areas. We recommend that the MDO should set down its procedures which can then be adopted as separate

Standing Orders in the Sections dealing with candidature (Section 70) and training and probation (Sections 71).

- 4.10.2 Transfer of presbyters or deacons from other denominations should be treated in comparable ways using the candidating procedures. In transferring deacons, and in view of widely divergent practice of diaconal ministries, we need to be clear in any specific case whether ordination to life-long service has taken place (regardless of whether it was expected to be subsumed in presbyteral ordination subsequently).

4.11 There should be equivalent Procedures for Candidature to one order of ministry from within the Other.

- 4.11.1 Procedures exist (S.O.760A) for offering from the diaconate to the presbyterate, and similar procedures should apply for the reverse movement. If a person were accepted as a candidate by the Conference, then being in full connexion would cease from 1 September following, and in the case of deaconesses and deacons so would membership of the MDO. Reinstatement would be possible under suitable circumstances if, during the course of probation, ordination to the new order was not recommended.
- 4.11.2 The MDO is discussing whether some kind of extended membership might be created by which laypersons and presbyters could be in association with the Order. Among benefits of such a development would be that deacons and deaconesses could continue association with the Order if accepted for presbyteral training.
- 4.11.3 In that Methodism sees the two orders of ministry as separate and equal, it is our judgement that for any person changing to the alternative order of ministry separate ordination is essential at the end of probation. Specifically, we judge that ordination to presbyteral ministry does not include automatic ordination to the diaconate. We have consulted with the Faith and Order committee which concurs. Deaconesses and deacons are called to focus and represent servant ministry. Diaconal ordination adds a specialised representative role to the truth that all God's people (including the unordained laity and the ordained presbyters) are called to serve.

5 OTHER PROVISIONS IN STANDING ORDERS WHICH NEED AMENDMENT

- 5.0 Standing Order changes will be brought to the Conference for approval in 1998. In addition to those which cover matters addressed in the previous sections of the report there will also be those which relate to the following matters:

5.1 Committee Constitutions and Other Roles

- 5.1.1 In various places deaconesses and deacons are excluded from participation in committees by specification of a total consisting of so many ministers and so many laypersons.

- 5.1.2 We consider there is no compelling need at this time to change this as regards:
- Committee to advise on special financial appeals to the Connexion (S.O.214(2))
 - Lay Assessors for ministerial candidates (S.O.701(5))
 - Trial services for candidates and probationers (S.O.703(1) and 717(3)).
- 5.1.3 We consider that an option for inclusion of deacons or deaconesses should be created in the case of:
- Methodist Publishing House Board (S.O.242(2)). We suggest that “four lay persons” might be changed to “four other persons not being ministers”.
- 5.1.4 We consider that inclusion of deaconesses and deacons should be required insofar as possible as regards:
- Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (S.O.321)
 - District Candidates Committee (S.O.483)
 - District Probationers Committee (S.O.484)
 - Connexional Advance and Priority Fund (S.O.971(1)).
- 5.1.5 As regards membership of the Methodist Council we note that there is now a specific person representing the Order, although this may not be a privilege that ought to be sustained permanently. In any case we think that there should be an option for including deaconesses or deacons in the district representation (S.O.210(1)) by opening up the places reserved for circuit ministers to be filled by either circuit ministers or deacons in circuit appointments. In this context we notice that non-circuit ministers (e.g. tutors, chaplains, those in sectors, those without appointment) form a much larger group currently excluded than that of deacons and deaconesses in circuit appointments.

5.2 Deacons and Deaconesses and Holy Communion

- 5.2.1 The practice of administering extended communion (S.O.609(1)) is currently exclusive and needs to be amended to allow for deacons and deaconesses as well as lay persons. It is considered that authorisations to preside at communion (S.O.011) should continue to remain possible for deaconesses and deacons in appropriate circumstances, although we endorse the MDO’s wish that this should be in exceptional cases only.

5.3 Involvement in Circuit and Local Church Life

- 5.3.1 Various circuit and local meetings need constitutional changes to permit the involvement of deacons and deaconesses now that it is proposed they should not have local membership, nor do they technically have pastoral charge.

- 5.3.2 It is also the case that ministers residing in a circuit (but not stationed in it) have membership of certain meetings whereas deaconesses and deacons in the same situation do not. This discrepancy needs correcting.
- 5.3.3 The right to preside at meetings (S.O.502) belongs to a superintendent who may appoint a deputy (Clause 1(b)), or failing that the ministers have the right to preside in order of seniority (Clause 1(c)). In practice the minister in pastoral charge normally presides at Church Councils. We are concerned that members of the Diaconal Order should not be expected to chair major meetings unwillingly, and therefore will not propose any amendment of clause (1(c)), but would interpret clause (1(b)) as allowing the superintendent to appoint a deacon or deaconess in particular cases. It is considered that in clause (2) which concerns chairing of committees there should be express provision for deaconesses or deacons as well as lay persons to fulfil this function.
- 5.3.4 The reference to circuit leadership teams (S.O.515(2)) needs to include deaconesses and deacons.

5.4 Disciplinary Matters

- 5.4.1 Section 02 already fully covers deacons and deaconesses. We need only to make provision for the Diaconal Session of Conference to be the responsible body for deaconesses and deacons in those cases where the Ministerial Session is responsible for presbyteral cases.
- 5.4.2 As regards continuance in training/probation (Section 03) it is the connexional Diaconal Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee that handles all cases whereas college and course oversight committees or district probationers committees handle presbyteral cases. It is recommended that this difference continue until the Order is significantly larger.
- 5.4.3 In Section 04 which deals with incompetence, we would again recommend a change from the Warden being the responsible person to the President after consulting the Warden.

5.5 Seniority and Arrangement of the Stations (S.O.737)

- 5.5.1 We recommend, after consultation with those working on the arrangement of the stations, that there should be a single list of district and circuit stations, and that under each circuit ministers and deacons and deaconesses in circuit appointments should comprise a single list according to seniority. Deacons and deaconesses should be indicated with a symbol after their names. Our preference would be that a form is adopted that uses appropriate symbols for every category of ministry rather than making itinerant presbyters appear to be the norm.
- 5.5.2 We see no need to construct Standing Orders for deacons and deaconesses to parallel those for presbyters as regards base of ministry, or transfers between

Welsh and English work (S.O.721-724). Standing Order 726 (Residence abroad) should cover deaconesses and deacons.

5.6 Sector and Other Appointments (Section 74 & S.O.762)

- 5.6.1 Currently the pastoral committee of the Order deals with applications. We recommend adoption of the procedure for ministers using the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments. It should in future consult with the Warden and advise the President. To this end it needs renaming as the Advisory Committee on Ministerial and Diaconal Appointments, and must have adequate diaconal personnel at its service.

5.7 Terms of Service

- 5.7.1 Small unintentional differences in relation to stipends (S.O.751 and 791(7)) and sabbaticals (S.O.757) will need bringing into line. Procedures for accompanied self-appraisal (S.O.755) are already standardised.
- 5.7.2 Other ministerial regulations which need to be specifically applied to members of the Diaconal Order as well concern removal date (S.O.737), permission to study (S.O.758), and maternity leave (S.O.761)
- 5.7.3 Manse accommodation (S.O.753) should increasingly become the norm for diaconal housing also (S.O.792). However there needs to be more flexibility to enable residence in particular localities where such accommodation is not available, and therefore the existing minimum of two-bedroom accommodation and the provision for consultation with the Warden should remain. So should S.O.792(2) requiring inspection of accommodation prior to the appointment beginning.
- 5.7.4 S.O.763 which concerns arrangements for sharing a manse when two ministers are married to each other should likewise be modified to apply where a deacon and deaconess are married to each other, or to a minister.

5.8 Procedures for Superannuating

- 5.8.1 We recommend that the term “supernumerary” be used in preference to “retired” to describe those deacons and deaconesses no longer stationed for active work. Application procedures should be in line with those for presbyters (Section 77), with permission sought from Convocation, confirmed by the Diaconal Session, and reported to the Representative Session. Supernumeraryship on the grounds of ill health should be considered by the medical committee after notice has been given both to the chairman of district and the Warden. The current provisional resolution allowing the President to authorise mid-year superannuation should be extended to deaconesses and deacons, and presbyteral procedures for return to full work should also apply.

6 REPLY TO MEMORIAL M42 (1996)

Date of Commencement of Ministry

The Gateshead and Jarrow (20/14) Circuit Meeting requests that Wesley Deaconesses and members of the Diaconal Order, when they become Ministers, have the date of the beginning of their Ministry stated in the minutes of the Methodist Conference.

Reply of the 1996 Conference

The memorial is referred to the Methodist Council for consideration by its working party on the Diaconate and report to the Conference in 1997 or 1998.

Recommended Response of the Working Party

Deacons and deaconesses already have their year of entry recorded in the Minutes. It is understood that what the Gateshead and Jarrow circuit seeks is that the Minutes of Conference should record the year of entry to the diaconate rather than presbyteral ministry for a presbyter who was previously a deacon or deaconess.

The year of entry is indicative of seniority (See S.O. 720), and therefore determines for example who is acting superintendent in case of need. The year is also relevant in relation to further training and sabbatical entitlements. It also has to do with pension rights but such information is separately maintained by the Methodist Ministers' Pension Fund.

It is noted that similar requests to that within this memorial might apply to ministers transferring from another denomination.

Having considered the issues the Council recommends that there be no change to the existing practice as regards the year of travel or the calculation of seniority, but that in the case of ministers who previously served as deaconesses or deacons the information "(Ordained deacon(ess) *year*)" be added for information only at the end of the entry. This would only apply to prior diaconal ministry following ordination in the Methodist Church; no other kind of prior service would be so noted.

If the Conference accepts the recommendation within the body of this report that would allow for a presbyter to candidate for the diaconate then a similar provision noting prior service as an ordained presbyter should apply once such a person was ordained a deacon(ess).

RESOLUTIONS

- 1 The Conference adopts the report.
- 2 The Conference amends the Deed of Union as follows, deletions being shown ~~thus~~, and insertions *thus*.

1 Particular Expressions.

- (iA) *'in the active work'* when used in relation to a minister or deacon means one who is not a supernumerary nor without appointment under any Standing Order in that behalf;

- (ii) 'admitted into full connexion' in reference to a minister *or deacon* means that he or she has been admitted by the Conference into full connexion as a minister *or a deacon respectively* of the Methodist Church and is entitled to the *that* status of such a minister;
- (xA) *'the Convocation' means the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order, as constituted by Standing Orders;*
- (xiA) *'deacon' when used in relation to the Methodist Church includes 'deaconess' and means a person ordained in accordance with Standing Orders to the office and ministry of a deacon, admitted into full connexion as a deacon and received into full membership of the Methodist Diaconal Order, or a person recognised and regarded as a deacon admitted into full connexion under the provisions contained in this Deed;*
- (xiB) *'Diaconal Session' means a session of the Conference of which, except for the President and Secretary and any other officers of that session appointed under Standing Orders, only deacons are members;*
- (xivA) *'lay' when used in relation to the Methodist Church refers to a person who is neither a minister nor a deacon;*
- (xviiiA) *'the Methodist Diaconal Order' means the body constituted under that name and regulated by Standing Orders;*
- ~~(xx) 'minister in the active work' means a minister who is not a supernumerary nor a minister without appointment under any Standing Orders in that behalf;~~
- (xxii) 'Ministerial Session' when used in relation to a Synod means a session of the Synod of which only ministers and *ministerial* probationers are members;
- (xxv) 'overseas District' means a District of the Methodist Church other than a home District and 'overseas station' means any station to which a minister, *deacon* or probationer is appointed by the Conference outside the home Districts;
- (xxviii) 'probationer' means a person who has been admitted by the Conference upon probation for the ministry *or diaconate* ~~and is fulfilling ministerial duty by the appointment of the Conference~~ *and is appointed to a station by the Conference* but has not yet been admitted into full connexion as a *minister or deacon respectively, and 'ministerial probationer' and 'diaconal probationer' have corresponding meanings;*
- (xxix) 'Representative Session' when used in relation to the Conference *means a session of the Conference other than the Ministerial or Diaconal Session and when used in relation to* ~~or~~ a Synod means a session of the ~~Conference or Synod respectively~~ other than the Ministerial Session;
- (xxxi) 'the stations' means the Circuits and other stations to which ministers, *deacons* and probationers are appointed by the Conference under clause 20 of this Deed and the verb 'to station' has a corresponding meaning;

(xxxii) 'supernumerary' means a minister *or deacon* permitted or directed under the provisions of this Deed or of Standing Orders to retire from the active work of the ministry;

(xxxv) '*the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order*' or '*the Warden*' means the person appointed in accordance with Standing Orders to have responsibility for the oversight of the Methodist Diaconal Order.

13 The Sessions. The Conference shall meet in Representative Session, ~~and~~ in Ministerial Session *and in Diaconal Session*, each constituted as provided below.

14 The Representative Session [*in the form provisionally adopted by the 1996 Conference*]

(1) **Numbers.** The Conference in its Representative Session shall consist of the number of persons prescribed by Standing Orders, of whom at least one third shall be ministers, ~~and~~ at least one third shall be lay persons *and at least the minimum number similarly prescribed shall be deacons*.

(2) **Membership.** The Conference in its Representative Session shall comprise:

- (i) the persons who when it commences its sitting hold office as the President, the Vice-President and the Secretary of the Conference;
- (ii) the ex-Presidents and ex-Vice-Presidents of the Conference who took office as President or Vice-President during the two Conferences next before the last preceding Conference;
- (iii) the President-Designate, the Vice-President Designate and (if any) the Secretary-Designate nominated by the last preceding Conference;
- (iv) assistant secretaries and other officers of the Conference, as prescribed by Standing Orders;
- (v) the Chairman of each home District;
- (vi) *the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order*;
- (vii) the Vice-President and the Secretary of the Irish Conference;
- (viii) the members and associate members appointed by or on behalf of the conferences and churches as prescribed in sub-clauses (3) and (4) below;
- (ix) The Conference-elected representatives, as prescribed below;
- (x) representatives of connexional committees, funds and institutions, as prescribed by Standing Orders;
- (xA) representatives, as prescribed by Standing Orders, of a Methodist Youth Conference to be established in accordance with Standing Orders;
- (xi) members elected by the Representative Sessions of Synods, as prescribed below.

(3) **The Irish Conference and the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.** The Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the General Conference of the United Methodist Church shall be entitled to appoint annually to the Conference four persons and two persons respectively.

(4) **Other Conferences and Churches.** (a) Persons may be appointed as associate members of the Conference by or on behalf of other autonomous Conferences not represented under sub-clause (3), by other churches in Great

Britain, by other Methodist churches and by united churches in which Methodists have joined.

(b) The numbers of such persons and the identities of the appointing bodies shall be prescribed by Standing Orders, which may make provision for the representation of some or all such bodies to be according to a rota.

(c) Associate members shall not be entitled to vote, and shall not be counted for the purposes of sub-clause (1), but shall for all other purposes, including the right to speak, be members of the Conference.

(5) Conference-elected Representatives. (a) The conference-elected representatives shall be elected by the Conference ~~and shall consist of equal numbers of ministers and lay persons.~~ ***At least one third of them shall be ministers, at least one third shall be lay persons, and at least one shall be a deacon.***

[Note: this wording incorporates both the proposal in this report as to diaconal representatives and that of the Methodist Council on the Commission on Conference as to the one-third proportions. If the latter is not adopted, this item will be moved in an amended form.]

(b) The numbers, term of office and other matters concerning the election and service of conference-elected representatives shall be prescribed by Standing Orders.

(c) Any conference-elected representative who becomes incapable of acting or unfit to act or ceases to be a member of the Methodist Church or, being a minister ***or deacon*** when elected, ceases to be a ~~minister~~ ***such*** shall be disqualified from being a conference-elected representative and his or her office shall forthwith become vacant.

(d) Casual vacancies occurring from time to time in the number of the conference-elected representatives shall be filled by the Conference.

(6) Synod Representatives. Except as provided in heads (i) to (xA) of sub-clause (2) ***and in clause 17(a)*** all members of the Representative Session of the Conference shall be elected by the Representative Sessions of the home Synods, the numbers of ministers, ***deacons*** and lay persons to be elected by each Synod being specified by the preceding Conference in accordance with rules prescribed by Standing Orders.

15A The Diaconal Session

- (a) The Conference in its Diaconal Session shall consist of***
- (i) the President and Secretary of the Conference;***
 - (ii) all those members of the Representative Session of the Conference who are deacons, including any persons ordained to the office and ministry of a deacon who are appointed under clause 14(3);***
 - (iii) those persons, whether deacons or not, appointed by the last preceding Conference as assistant secretaries or other officers of the Conference in its Diaconal Session;***
 - (iv) as associate members, any persons ordained to the office and ministry of a deacon who are appointed as associate members under clause 14(4);***

(v) *subject to sub-clauses (b) and (c), such other deacons as attend under their own arrangements and with the permission of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order.*

(b) *Persons who are members of the Conference under heads (iv) and (v) of sub-clause (a) shall not be entitled to vote nor, except as otherwise resolved by the Conference at the time, to be present during any closed meeting of the Conference.*

(c) *Any meeting of the Conference in its Diaconal Session convened under clause 24(i) shall be a meeting of those only who are members under heads (i) and (ii) of sub-clause (a) above.*

17 Substitutes. (a) The Conference shall have power to elect a substitute for any member . . . except . . . or a member elected . . . ~~or by a Representative Session of the Synod,~~ *but in the case of a member elected by a Representative Session of a Synod only upon nomination in accordance with Standing Orders:*

- (i) *if the member is a deacon, by the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order; or*
- (ii) *otherwise, by an officer or officers of that Synod.*

[Note: this wording incorporates both the proposal in this Report and that in the Methodist Council report as to substitutes for District Representatives. If the latter is not adopted this item will be moved in amended form.]

(b) ~~While the Conference meets first in Ministerial Session it shall in that session have power to elect such a substitute for any such member who is a minister.~~

The Conference shall have power when meeting before the Representative Session to elect in the Ministerial or in the Diaconal Session such a substitute for any such member of that session.

19 Standing Orders. The Conference shall have power from time to time to make, amend or revoke Standing Orders or other rules or regulations for the constitution and procedure of the Conference, for the summoning and meeting of the Conference in the interval between its ordinary meetings, for the determination of the privileges and obligations of ministers, *deacons* and probationers whether as a whole or by categories, including eligibility for membership of the Conference and appointment to the stations, and for the government of the Methodist Church in general and shall also have power to adopt in any special case that may arise any means that it may deem necessary to meet it; provided that no such Standing Order, rule, regulation or means may be contrary to law or to this Deed or to the purposes of the Methodist Church.

20 The Stations. The Conference shall annually appoint as ministers, *deacons* and probationers to the Circuits and other stations such persons as it thinks fit and in the exercise of this power it shall be lawful for the Conference notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in the trust deeds of any of the said Churches or denominations existing at the date of union to appoint a minister to the use and enjoyment of any place of worship for more than three years successively.

21 Other particular powers. The Conference shall have power at its discretion:

- (i) to continue or found or authorise the founding of connexional funds or institutions for the promulgation of the Gospel at home and abroad, for assistance to Circuits or Local Churches or for the benefit of retired and superannuated ministers *or deacons* or the widows, widowers or children of deceased ministers *or deacons* or for other objects and purposes of or in connection with the Methodist Church and to direct the application and management thereof and to approve any scheme for the amalgamation of any such funds or institutions, whether founded before or after the date of this Deed, and whether belonging to or connected with any of the said Churches or denominations existing at the date of union or to the Methodist Church and for the transfer in connection with any such amalgamation of any of such funds from the existing trustees or other persons having the legal control thereof to the trustees of any other of such funds or institutions;

23 Functions of the Ministerial Session.

(b) While the Conference meets ~~first~~ in Ministerial Session *before the Representative Session* it shall in that session have power to appoint the ministerial members of any committee required by Standing Orders to be appointed by the Conference from among its own members and to function in both ~~sessions~~ *that and the Representative Session*.

(h) Admission (including re-admission) into full connexion *as a minister*, whether of probationers or others, shall in all cases be by the Conference in its Representative Session, which shall by the same act resolve that any person thus admitted and not already ordained shall be ordained by the laying-on of hands, but no person shall be presented for admission into full connexion without the judgment of the Ministerial Session that he or she is fit for such admission and, if appropriate, ordination.

(i) [*Final sentence, in the form provisionally adopted by the 1996 Conference:*] Any permissions granted by the President shall be reported to the Conference in both ~~sessions~~ *the Ministerial and Representative Sessions*.

(j) The deaths of all ministers shall be reported to the Conference in both ~~sessions~~ *the Ministerial and Representative Sessions* and obituaries shall be approved by the Conference in its Ministerial Session and reported to the Representative Session and there incorporated in the said Journal.

(k) The resignation of a minister or withdrawal of a *ministerial* probationer shall be reported to the Conference in both ~~sessions~~ *the Ministerial and Representative Sessions*.

(l) The Conference in its Ministerial Session shall have such functions in relation to the stationing of ministers and *ministerial* probationers as may be prescribed by Standing Orders.

(m) The Conference may in its Ministerial Session discuss any subject in the Agenda of the Representative *or the Diaconal* Session or any other subject within the jurisdiction of the Conference and communicate its views thereon to ~~the Representative Session~~ *one or both of the other sessions* by resolution or otherwise.

23A Functions of the Diaconal Session. (a) *In addition to any powers conferred by any other clause of this Deed the Conference shall in its Diaconal Session have the powers and perform the functions specified in the following sub-clauses.*

(b) *While the Conference meets in Diaconal Session before the Representative Session it shall in that session have power to appoint the diaconal members of any committee required by Standing Orders to be appointed by the Conference from among its own members and to function in both that and the Representative Session.*

(c) *The Conference shall in its Diaconal Session make such other appointments as may be prescribed by Standing Orders.*

(d) *The Conference in its Diaconal Session shall have exclusive jurisdiction over the following business:*

- (i) *continuance or discontinuance in training or on probation or reinstatement of each student or probationer in training or on probation for diaconal ministry;*
- (ii) *any appeal to the Conference arising out of any charge against a deacon or probationer or a student in training for diaconal ministry.*

(e) *The decisions of the Diaconal Session in the exercise of its jurisdiction under sub-clause (d) and all appointments made by the Conference in that session in exercise of its powers in that behalf shall be reported to the Conference in its Representative Session and there incorporated in the Journal provided for by Clause 36.*

(f) *The Conference shall in its Diaconal Session engage in conversation on the servant ministry of the church.*

(g) *Acceptance of candidates for diaconal ministry shall be by the Conference in its Representative Session, but no candidate shall be proposed for acceptance except upon the recommendation of the Diaconal Session.*

(h) *Admission (including re-admission) into full connexion as a deacon, whether of probationers or others, shall in all cases be by the Conference in its Representative Session, which shall by the same act resolve that any person thus admitted and not already ordained shall be ordained by the laying-on of hands, but no person shall be presented for admission into full connexion without the judgment of the Diaconal Session that he or she is fit for such admission and, if appropriate, for ordination.*

(i) *The Conference shall by Standing Order prescribe the circumstances in which a deacon may or shall become supernumerary on the ground of age, years of travel, ill health, compassion, difficulty of finding an appointment or otherwise. A deacon may be directed to become supernumerary by any competent church court upon finding a charge against him or her proved, and may in cases of urgency arising between meetings of the Conference be permitted by the President to become supernumerary on the ground of ill health, but otherwise all permissions and directions to become supernumeraries shall be given by the Conference in its Representative Session. All cases requiring a decision of the Conference shall be considered first by the Diaconal Session, which shall recommend to the Representative Session who shall become supernumeraries and*

on what grounds. Any permissions granted by the President shall be reported to the Conference in both the Diaconal and Representative Sessions.

(j) The deaths of all deacons shall be reported to the Conference in both the Diaconal and Representative Sessions and obituaries shall be approved by the Conference in its Diaconal Session and reported to the Representative Session and there incorporated in the said Journal.

(k) The resignation of a deacon or withdrawal of a diaconal probationer shall be reported to the Conference in both the Diaconal and Representative Sessions.

(l) The Conference in its Diaconal Session shall have such functions in relation to the stationing of deacons and diaconal probationers as may be prescribed by Standing Orders.

(m) The Conference may in its Diaconal Session discuss any subject in the Agenda of the Representative or the Ministerial Session or any other subject within the jurisdiction of the Conference and communicate its views thereon to one or both of the other sessions by resolution or otherwise.

24 Transaction of General Business.

(a) In this clause ‘general business’ means decisions on matters of policy or principle, the adoption, amendment or repeal of Standing Orders, other general resolutions and all other business of the Conference not involving decisions on matters within Clause 23 *or* 23A as to particular persons.

(c) In this clause ‘shared business’ means any general business which concerns:

- (i) **
- (ii) the procedure of the Ministerial Session of the Conference; or
- (iii) the continuance, composition, functions or procedure of the Ministerial Session of the Synods; *or*
- (iv) *the continuance as a separate body of the Diaconal Session as provided by this Deed or the definition, by virtue of this Deed, of the relative duties and privileges of that and the Representative Session respectively; or*
- (v) *the procedure of the Diaconal Session of the Conference; or*
- (vi) *the continuance, composition, functions or procedure of the Convocation.*

***[Note: a further amendment inserting a new clause (c)(i) will be moved under the business of the Law and Polity Committee.]*

(d) Shared business *which concerns head (i), (ii) or (iii) of sub-clause (c)* shall be dealt with as specified in sub-clauses (e) to (j), which relate only to such business except as provided in clauses (k) and (l). *Shared business which concerns head (iv), (v) or (vi) shall be similarly dealt with, substituting the words “Diaconal Session” for “Ministerial Session” in sub-clauses (e) to (l) wherever they occur.*

(i) Adoption by the Representative Session of a resolution in any other form shall be conditional upon ratification by the Ministerial Session, which shall be reconvened for the purpose only of deciding whether to concur with the resolution of the Representative Session or to reaffirm its own decision, and may deal with that

matter with or without notice, adjournment or debate, and in the presence or absence of the lay members of the Conference *who are not members of that reconvened session*. Concurrence by the Ministerial Session shall dispose of the business.

25 Reference between Sessions. ~~Either~~ Any session of the Conference may refer or delegate to ~~the other~~ *another*, for comment or decision, any matter within the jurisdiction of the referring session. The majority required for delegation of a matter for decision shall be that required for a substantive resolution on that matter. Any comment or decision on any such matter shall be reported to the referring session and any such decision so reported to the Representative Session shall there be incorporated in the Journal provided for by Clause 36.

27 The Vice-President. There shall be a Vice-President of the Conference who shall be a lay member of the Methodist Church *or deacon* and shall be elected by the Conference by a clear majority of the votes cast. He or she shall be designated at the preceding Conference by ballot and by a clear majority of the votes cast.

28 Who presides at the Conference.

(d) If the President is absent from any meeting of the Diaconal Session such other minister or deacon as the Conference may choose shall during the absence of the President preside and act as President of the Conference and in each such case with all the powers rights and duties of the President.

29 The President and the Stations.

(a) If any person appointed as minister or probationer to any station for any year dies or ceases to be in the active work the President may appoint another person as minister or probationer to take the place for such year or the remainder of such year (as the case may be) of the person so dying or ceasing to be in the active work. *The President may, after consulting with the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, exercise similar powers in relation to diaconal appointments.*

(b) If in the opinion of the President it becomes necessary or expedient during the year to remove from or appoint to a station as minister or probationer any person (including a ministerial student) so appointed or eligible to be so appointed or to change the appointment of anyone so appointed the President may effect that appointment, removal or change of appointment in such manner as he or she thinks fit. *The President may, after consulting with the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, exercise similar powers in relation to diaconal appointments.*

40 Church Courts. District Synods (which shall include all the ministers *and deacons* stationed in the District), Circuit Meetings, Church Councils, Local Preachers' Meetings, General Church Meetings and any other meetings and committees shall be constituted in such manner, of such persons, and with and subject to such powers, duties and provisions as may consistently with this Deed be provided in that behalf from time to time by the Conference.

43 The Irish Conference.

(a) Subject to such provisions of law (if any) as may be applicable in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland and in accordance with the provisions constituting the Methodist Church in Ireland the President of the Conference shall also be the President of the Irish Conference and the Conference shall appoint annually two other ministers, its Vice-President and two ~~lay~~ **other** persons as representatives to the Irish Conference. The appointment of such other ministers may be made by the Conference in the Ministerial Session.

45 Ministers of other Churches.

(a) Such other persons as the Conference may from time to time specify, if appointed by the Conference to the **ministerial** stations in the home Districts or overseas, shall during the period of such appointment only be recognised and regarded as ministers of the Methodist Church admitted into full connexion.

45A Deacons of other Churches.

(a) Such persons as the Conference may from time to time specify, if appointed by the Conference to the stations in the home Districts or overseas, shall during the period of such appointment only be recognised and regarded as deacons of the Methodist Church admitted into full connexion.

(b) They shall be eligible for membership of the Conference and of other church courts during the period of such appointment as if they were deacons in full connexion with the Conference.

(c) Persons who under the provisions of this clause are recognised and regarded as deacons of the Methodist Church admitted into full connexion shall be subject to the rules and discipline of the Conference of the Methodist Church while filling any appointment in the home work or serving in any of the overseas stations of the Methodist Church.

3 The Conference directs the Council to bring to the 1998 Conference the changes to Standing Orders which will give effect to the proposals within this report.

4 The Conference adopts the recommended reply to Memorial M42 of 1996.

(Agenda 1997, pp. 165-191)

A further report, consisting mainly of changes to Standing Orders, was brought to the Conference of 1998 (*Agenda 1998*, pp. 503-577).

(iv) Local Preachers

RECOGNITION OF ORDER OF LOCAL PREACHERS (1996)

MEMORIAL M55 (1995): RECOGNITION OF ORDER OF LOCAL PREACHERS

- 1 The following Memorial (M55) was presented to the 1995 Conference:

The Thornley (13/10) Circuit Meeting (Present 36. Vote: Unan) request that the order of Local Preachers be recognised as an order of Ministry on the following grounds:

 1. Local Preachers are part of an order.
 2. The Order is committed to providing a particular form of ministry viz – The ministry of the word.
 3. Local Preachers make a lifelong commitment.
 4. Local Preachers are under discipline.
 5. While they do not go for stationing, they do go when and where they are sent within their circuits and the availability of other ministers for stationing is now limited i.e. Ministers in local appointments.
- 2 The Conference referred the Memorial to the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Division of Ministries and the Law and Polity Committee for study and report to the Conference of 1996. The Committee has consulted as directed, and reports as follows.
- 3 The Faith and Order Committee notes that the Memorial from the Thornley Circuit consists of a request supported by five arguments. The first argument is that Local Preachers already belong to an order. The term 'order', applied to local preachers, does not appear in any current official documents (for example, the Deed of Union, Standing Orders, *The Methodist Service Book*), though it was used in the 1936 recognition service. It seems unlikely that in 1936 there was any clear sense of a lay 'order of ministry' or, for that matter, that local preachers were a sort of 'religious order'. It is not clear, therefore, what particular significance the use of the word had in 1936 or what the Thornley Circuit's statement 'Local Preachers are part of an order' means.
- 4 It could, of course, be argued that Local Preachers are in fact members of an order, despite the failure of our documents to say so explicitly, and that this order ought to be recognised as an order of ministry.
- 5 The term 'order of ministry' has not been commonly used in Methodism: it has entered our vocabulary largely as a result of the protracted deliberations on the

nature of the ordained diaconal ministry. It is the case that, in some branches of the Church, it was possible to be admitted to a 'minor' order without being ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands. Methodist writing on the subject of ministry has, however, avoided any suggestion of 'graded ministries'; the presbyteral and diaconal orders of ministry are described as being parallel and distinctive, with neither being superior to the other. In our documents, the ministry of the whole people of God is stressed, with ordained (presbyteral and diaconal) ministry seen in its context. So any talk of 'minor orders' would not be appropriate.

- 6 At the same time, the term 'order of ministry' has been employed in our documents only in connection with those ordained as presbyters or as deacons and deaconesses. It would be a major departure from our usage to employ the term in respect of people who were not ordained.
- 7 The Thornley Circuit argues that 'The Order is committed to providing a particular form of ministry viz - The ministry of the word'. It is true that Local Preachers are committed in this way. But Class Leaders and Pastoral Visitors are also committed to specific forms of ministry. So are Lay Workers, Church Stewards, Workers with Children and Young People and many others. Unless the Church were to countenance the introduction of an almost infinite variety of 'orders of ministry', the Thornley Circuit's second argument could not be regarded as a ground for so recognizing Local Preachers. In any case, in our various reports and statements about the presbyteral and diaconal orders of ministry, the emphasis has been upon focus and representation rather than function.
- 8 The Thornley Circuit's third argument, that Local Preachers make a lifelong commitment, is generally speaking true in practice (though the official Recognition and Commissioning Service does not actually mention lifelong commitment). It is also true that lifelong commitment is a criterion suggested in the 1993 report on the Diaconate as one of a number of distinctive features of both presbyteral and diaconal ministry, but it is only one such feature. This is not an argument that can stand alone.
- 9 The fourth argument, that Local Preachers are under discipline, is not a valid argument for recognizing them as members of an order of ministry. Every Methodist member is subject to discipline.
- 10 Finally, the Thornley Circuit raises the question of stationing. Here there is some confusion between stationing and itinerancy. All Ministers, deacons and deaconesses are in fact stationed. The names of those in local appointments, those in other appointments and supernumeraries appear on the stations. The contrast being made by the Thornley Circuit meeting is actually between people who are itinerant and those who are not. Being itinerant is not a significant factor in the context of an order of ministry; being stationed is.
- 11 It will be apparent that the Faith and Order Committee believes that the grounds proposed in the Memorial are not strong enough to support the request that Local Preachers be recognised as belonging to an order of ministry. The Committee further believes that there are other issues to be considered, which

further support the view that the Conference should resist the Thornley Circuit's request.

- 12 First, to regard Local Preachers as an order of ministry would be to introduce an unacceptable division into lay ministry. It has already been pointed out that other lay people commit themselves to specific ministries (pastoral visitors, etc) but the argument should not rest there. There is such a thing as a theology of the laity, but not of particular tasks within the laity. What is needed is strong affirmation of the theology of lay ministry, as well as an equally strong affirmation of the theology of ordained ministry.
- 13 Second, to talk of Local Preachers as being members of an order of ministry might run the risk of 'clericalising the laity'. One of the most valuable features of the ministry exercised by Local Preachers lies precisely in the fact that they are lay people. They live and work within the 'secular' world. They are not, for the most part, theological specialists, but they are able to relate the Gospel to the everyday world in a way that a minister often cannot. It is important that the 'layness' of their work is not obscured; rather, if anything, it should be emphasised.
- 14 Local Preachers play a vital and greatly cherished rôle in the life of Methodism, a rôle which frequently goes far beyond the conduct of Sunday worship. Individually and corporately, they are held in high regard throughout the Connexion. The Faith and Order Committee does not believe that to regard them as members of an order of ministry would do anything further to enhance the work of Local Preachers; on the contrary, it might obscure the 'layness' of that work and prove divisive. Furthermore, the balance of the theological arguments weighs heavily against adopting such a policy.

RESOLUTIONS

- 1 The Conference adopts the report.
- 2 The Conference resolves that the report be the Conference's further reply to Memorial M55 (1995).

(Agenda 1996, pp.212-215)

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