

Memorials to the Conference

Notes for the guidance of members of the Conference

1. Introduction to memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They suggest that the Conference takes action or makes a statement on an issue. The memorials received since the last Conference are listed in this report. These memorials may help members of the Conference to judge the main concerns currently felt in the Connexion, and the strength of opinion they represent.

Each year the Methodist Council is required to appoint a Memorials Committee made up of representatives from Districts to aid the Conference in replying to each memorial. The replies to these memorials have been drafted by members of the Connexional Team and officers of other relevant bodies. They have been scrutinised by the Memorials Committee and amended where the committee felt it was appropriate.

The committee recommends to the Conference the replies printed in the Agenda under each memorial. The Conference binds itself either to agree each reply, to amend it, or to agree an alternative reply (see Standing Order 133(4), printed in the Rules of Procedure on page 12 of Volume One of the Agenda).

In some of its responses, the committee makes no comment on the substance of a memorial, but indicates that the reply of the Conference is given in other resolutions of the Conference. This kind of response does not mean that the committee has not taken seriously the points made in the memorial. It means that another report deals with the issue more fully. Debate on that report gives the Conference an opportunity to discuss the issues raised by the memorial.

2. Consideration of the memorials by the Conference

Any member of the Conference has the right to move an amendment to the reply recommended by the committee, or to propose that it is substituted by a different reply. Amendments to replies should be submitted in the form of a notice of motion, the deadlines for which can be found in the First Report of the Conference Business Committee on page 24 of the Agenda. However, members are urged to give notice of their intention to move an amendment as early as possible and not to wait until the deadline.

If the Conference rejects a reply, an acceptable alternative must, then or later, be put to and agreed by the Conference. In addition, any two members of the Conference may, by notice of motion submitted on the first day of the relevant session, propose that, instead of dealing with the committee's recommended replies in the ordinary course of business, the Conference shall debate a resolution based on one or more of the memorials.

This year, the Memorials Committee has recommended to the Conference Business Committee that the replies to any memorials which relate to other items of business in the Agenda be taken at the same time as that business, and that the remaining replies should be placed in the *en bloc* business of the Conference, unless the Business Committee feel that they should be debated. Any recommended reply to a memorial which is the subject of an amending notice of motion will automatically be removed from *en bloc* business (see Standing Order 134A(1)(c), Agenda page 13).

Members of the Conference with questions on any matter affecting memorials and the procedures described above should consult the Memorials Secretary, Martin Harker. For example, if any member wishes to change the recommended reply of the committee, the Memorials Secretary would be happy to advise on how and when to propose either an amendment or the substitution of a different reply.

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The Memorials Secretary will notify each Synod and Circuit of the reply the Conference has made to its memorial.

M1 Criteria for candidating for the ministry

The Wales Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 71; Voting: 69 for, 1 against) recognises the hurt and disappointment felt when for a variety of reasons and at a very late stage in the process a candidate for presbyteral ministry was unable to appear before the Ministerial Candidates' Selection Committee because of not meeting the three year membership qualification required under Standing Order 710.

Accordingly, the Synod requests the Conference to:

- (a) ensure that all future information about candidating for ordained ministry makes it clear that the three year membership qualification (under SO 710) refers to membership of the Methodist Church in Britain;
- (b) clarify the end date by which this period of qualification needs to be completed; and
- (c) ask the Ministries Committee to examine whether the current period of qualification (three years) is the best one and whether there may be some flexibility allowed where a candidate has been a member of another Methodist Church.

Reply

The Wales Synod raises some important questions for which the Conference is grateful. That the memorial was prompted by a particular and unfortunate circumstance has been noted and the connexional officers concerned have already acted to ensure that as far as possible ambiguity around the requirement of Standing Order 710 (1)(a) is removed from the candidating documentation.

Standing Orders are silent on the question of the date from which the three year period is calculated. Given that the date determined by the Ministerial Candidates' and Probationers' Oversight Committee (MCPOC) under Standing Order 711(3) is 30 September, it would seem appropriate that that be the date by which a person should be qualified to candidate. It would, however, make sense for the Conference to bring the membership requirement into line with the other requirement of SO 710(1) that the candidate be a fully accredited local preacher or (if not local preacher and offering for the diaconate) a Worship Leader by stipulating that these qualifications should also be met by 30 September in the connexional year in which the candidate offers.

The period of qualification as a member was examined by the 2011 Conference which decided not to change current practice. Offering for ministry requires a level of embeddedness in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain which can only come with time and engagement as a member in the life of a Circuit or a number of Circuits. The 2011 debate was prompted by the desire of recently baptised Christians to offer for ordained ministry. A slightly different question is raised by this memorial in relation to those coming into the Methodist Church in Britain from another Conference. The Conference directs that this question be referred to the Ministries Committee but asks that committee to note that any who train for ordained ministry without being fully conversant with the life and mission of the Methodist Church in Britain will enter a comparatively brief period of formation at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

The Conference also notes that membership is used as a measure of a person's involvement in the life of the Church. There is growing anecdotal evidence of resistance to or even neglect of the opportunities and discipline of membership amongst those who count themselves as Christian and part of the Church. As this memorial demonstrates in one instance, membership frees a baptized person to answer a call to serve the church in a number of ways. The Conference would therefore encourage all Circuits to review the ways in which they encourage those who have not already made the commitment to explore becoming full members of the Church and the ways in which the joys and privileges of membership are celebrated.

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The Conference accepts the memorial and directs that the Ministries Committee bring a considered response to the 2017 Conference. The Conference further directs MCPOC to bring a proposed revision to SO 710(1) to the 2017 Conference in accordance with the second paragraph of this reply.

M2 Itinerant ministry and stationing

The South East District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 152; Voting: 116 for, 7 against) asks the Conference to:

- (a) explore ways of demonstrating the Methodist Church's continuing commitment to itinerant ministry and
- (b) explore ways of reducing stationing pressure.

The Synod requests that all implications are considered in a review of the stationing process to create a system that better matches the current resources of the Church.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South East District Synod for its memorial. A major review of the stationing processes of the Methodist Church took place in 2008 and the implications of that review (including in those areas referred to in the memorial) continue to be reflected upon and worked out under the direction of the Stationing and Ministries Committees.

In addition, the Faith and Order Committee has been directed by the Conference in consultation with the Ministries Committee to undertake work on the theology and nature of lay and ordained ministry in the Methodist Church in Britain with a final report with any recommendations to be brought no later than the 2018 Conference. This work is likely to include further consideration of itinerancy.

The Conference therefore declines the request for a further review of the stationing process but directs the Stationing, Ministries, and Faith and Order Committees to ensure that the matters raised in this memorial are kept in mind in their future work and reports.

M3 Questions asked in the Presbyteral Session of Synod

The Cornwall District Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 37; Voting: 31 for, 1 against), requests the Conference to review the suitability of the questions required to be asked in the Presbyteral Session of the District Synod in accordance with Standing Order 488 section (A) of the Agenda regarding Attendance and section (B) regarding Ministerial Vocation.

Whilst upholding the principle of the annual inquiry as regards the commitment of each presbyter to his or her calling and also recognising that attendance at the Presbyteral Session of the District Synod and responding in the affirmative is very meaningful to many presbyters, it is observed that the seriousness and the solemnity with which the required questions have been and should be asked and answered no longer pertain. There are five areas of concern about their suitability.

1. Context. Whilst there is a variety of practice across the Districts, the setting in which the questions are asked varies from District to District. The traditional practice of each minister being required in turn to respond in the affirmative, usually within the context of the Communion Service, can be time consuming if the number is high, whilst the reading out of names in some settings becomes little different from an attendance roll-call. The names are not read out in all Districts.

2. Observance by Presbyters.

- (a) Attendance. There are those who ignore the requirements of Standing Order 741 (Attendance at Synod) to be present unless excused by dispensation granted by the Chair. Such presbyters neither seek a dispensation nor do they have a compelling reason for non-attendance.

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- (b) Dispensation. It is a minor point, but indicative of attitude, that some presbyters send apologies for absence to the Chair, but do not request a dispensation.
- (c) Limited Attendance. It has been known for some presbyters to leave Synod after responding to the questions – thus failing to meet the requirement ‘to remain throughout its sessions’.

3. Discipline. Chairs of Districts, whose office requires the oversight of discipline, have difficulty in applying it regarding presbyters who are known not to have been in attendance for a number of years – indeed, the question is raised as to what sanctions a Chair has in cases of deliberate absence or when as regards certain aspects of the faith a presbyter is known not “to preach our doctrines” or “administer our discipline”. Further, it is noted that there is a reluctance on the part of those present at the Presbyteral Session to question why certain presbyters are absent without a dispensation.

4. Integrity. The requirement that each presbyter makes an individual affirmation to the questions under ‘Ministerial Vocation’ means that it is left to the judgement of each as to whether she or he continues “faithfully to discharge the obligations laid upon us” and “to believe and preach our doctrines and administer our discipline”. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a widening spectrum of understanding regarding obligations. What some presbyters regard as essential obligations are not regarded as such by others. Further, there is evidence of non-attendance in order not to answer the question. This raises a question over reliance upon self-judgement.

5. Secular Legislation. There is the impact of modern employment legislation upon the traditional understanding of the vocational role of a Methodist minister/presbyter. No longer can it be assumed that disciplinary action can be taken without there being a legal challenge. This adds to the difficulty of determining what action should be taken when a presbyter fails to comply with SO 741.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Presbyteral Session of the Cornwall District Synod for its memorial requesting that the Conference review the suitability of the questions required to be asked in the Presbyteral Session of the District Synod in accordance with Standing Order 488 section (A) of the Agenda regarding Attendance and section (B) regarding Ministerial Vocation. The Conference recognises some of the difficulties the memorial identifies; however, the Conference wishes to affirm the significance and centrality of the questions of the Annual Inquiry.

The Conference notes that the context in which the Annual Inquiry takes place should be one of inspiring worship, presbyteral collegiality and care for one another. Whether the questions are responded to by individuals or by communal response the re-affirmation of the promises made and obligations undertaken at ordination should be undertaken in a manner which affirms, encourages and inspires. Failure to demonstrate a willingness to participate in the Annual Inquiry and attend the Synod should be taken very seriously as participation in the life of the Synod is a positive expression of the obligation of a presbyter to participate in the life of the community of presbyters. A willingness to receive ministerial support and benefits should be accompanied by a willingness to affirm ministerial responsibilities and obligations in a manner consistent with being in a lifelong covenant relationship with the Conference (Standing Order 700). Persistent failure adequately to fulfil obligations (see Standing Order 040) is a serious matter and could result in the instigation of a complaint or competence procedures.

The Conference encourages all those planning Presbyteral Sessions of Synods to ensure that they contain excellent resourcing, nurture and nourishment for the presbyteral life in order that presence is valued and encouraged.

The environment created should be one in which presbyters watch over each other in love and are therefore unafraid to encourage each other in the making of these promises by enquiring of those who absent themselves and (remembering the generous interpretation of “our doctrines” that our tradition permits) reflecting together on the challenge and delight of the affirmation they are required to make.

The Conference declines the memorial, but directs the Ministries Committee to circulate to all presbyters a statement, based on the above reply which affirms the significance and centrality of the questions of the annual inquiry.

M4 The circuit reinvitation process

Currently a circuit Invitation Committee (CIC) wishing to recommend a presbyteral extension to the Circuit Meeting does so after many months of research and consultation which is intended to identify the mood of both the presbyter and the church. Such a recommendation is thorough and must be sent out 14 days in advance of the Circuit Meeting. However, oppositions to the recommendation may be received up to 24 hours before the Circuit Meeting. Furthermore, whilst the substance of the opposition must be advised, there is no current requirement for this to be in written form. Presentation given only orally potentially creates a negative and pastorally painful atmosphere into which the vote is cast, thus possibly skewing the outcome.

The Sankey Valley (18/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 63; Voting: unanimous) proposes to the Conference that all oppositions to the CIC recommendation be received in written form by the Chair of the Circuit Meeting seven days (168 hours) prior to the Circuit Meeting, instead of 24 hours as current. This would give the CIC sufficient time to prepare a formal response, which could then be read out at the Circuit Meeting after the objection.

The Circuit Meeting therefore requests the Conference, subject to editorial advice from the Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, to amend Standing Order 545(3F) and (3G) in the following terms:

(3F) If an extension is recommended by the circuit Invitation Committee, there shall be circulated with the recommendation a notice in writing giving the name of the person who will be chairing the relevant Circuit Meeting and requiring members of the Circuit Meeting to inform the chair **of the meeting in written form no later than 7 days (168 hours)** ~~by 24 hours~~ before the time fixed for the commencement of the meeting if they intend to oppose the recommendation or move an amendment, with the substance of their grounds for doing so. If no such intention has been notified by the time allowed then no vote shall be taken on the recommendation and the extension recommended by the committee shall be taken as offered by the meeting.

(3G) If such an intention has been notified by one or more members by the time allowed **the written grounds for opposition shall be circulated no later than the start of the meeting, and** the meeting shall hear the member or members concerned, **a response prepared by the circuit Invitations Committee** and any response by the presbyter ~~and by or on behalf of the committee and then~~ **before** considering the matter and proceeding to vote.

We feel this would remove much of the potential bias and help to prepare the Circuit Meeting to make a more objective vote.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sankey Valley Circuit Meeting for its memorial, which was considered by the March 2016 meeting of the Stationing Committee. The Stationing Committee acknowledged that the reinvitation process can be a bruising as well as an affirming experience; the relevant Standing Orders and the *Code of Practice for all involved in the Invitation and Stationing Process* are intended to ensure that good practice is applied consistently across the Connexion in order to help the parties concerned and, ultimately, the Conference to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the presbyters and deacons and to the Circuits about how the Church's resources, in terms of its ordained ministers, are best used. The

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Stationing Committee affirmed the spirit of this memorial, believing that the changes proposed will help to ensure that this area of the process is as prayerful, fair and considered as possible.

The Conference accepts the memorial with one additional amendment (to give those attending the meeting time to consider the proposed grounds) and adopts the following changes to Standing Orders 545(3F) and (3G) with effect from 1 September 2017:

(3F) If an extension is recommended by the circuit Invitation Committee, there shall be circulated with the recommendation a notice in writing giving the name of the person who will be chairing the relevant Circuit Meeting and requiring members of the Circuit Meeting to inform the chair **of the meeting in written form no later than one week** ~~by 24 hours~~ before the time fixed for the commencement of the meeting if they intend to oppose the recommendation or move an amendment, with the substance of their grounds for doing so. If no such intention has been notified by the time allowed then no vote shall be taken on the recommendation and the extension recommended by the committee shall be taken as offered by the meeting.

(3G) If such an intention has been notified by one or more members by the time allowed, **the written grounds for opposing or proposing an amendment to the recommendation shall be circulated no later than 24 hours before the meeting and** the meeting shall hear the member or members concerned, **a response by or on behalf of the circuit Invitation Committee** and any response by the presbyter ~~and by or on behalf of the committee~~ and **shall** then consider the matter and proceed to vote.

The Conference also adopts the following changes to Standing Orders 546(10) and (11), regarding the reinvitation of deacons, with effect from 1 September 2017:

(10) If an extension is recommended by the circuit Invitation Committee, there shall be circulated with the recommendation a notice in writing giving the name of the person who will be chairing the relevant Circuit Meeting and requiring members of the Circuit Meeting to inform the chair **of the meeting in written form no later than one week** ~~by 24 hours~~ before the time fixed for the commencement of the meeting if they intend to oppose the recommendation or move an amendment, with the substance of their grounds for doing so. If no such intention has been notified by the time allowed then no vote shall be taken on the recommendation and the extension recommended by the committee shall be taken as offered by the meeting.

(11) If such an intention has been notified by one or more members by the time allowed, **the written grounds for opposing or proposing an amendment to the recommendation shall be circulated no later than 24 hours before the meeting and** the meeting shall hear the member or members concerned, **a response by or on behalf of the circuit Invitation Committee** and any response by the deacon ~~and by or on behalf of the committee~~ and **shall** then consider the matter and proceed to vote.

The Conference directs that the *Code of Practice for all involved in the Invitation and Stationing Process 2018* be updated accordingly.

M5 Nurturing the vocation of supernumerary ministers

The York and Hull District Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 80; Voting: 63 for, 2 against), recognising that there are now more retired ministers than those stationed to appointments, and aware of Standing Order 792 for supernumerary ministers to “continue as he or she is able to exercise his or her ministry in collaboration with those in the active work in the Circuit in which he or she is stationed or elsewhere by agreement with the appropriate Superintendent or Chair”, requests the Conference to consider, at all levels of the Church’s life, in what ways the vocation of ministers no longer subject to stationing might best be nurtured and enabled.

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Presbyteral Session of the York and Hull District Synod both for its memorial and for the opportunity that it presents to give thanks for the ministry of supernumerary ministers in the life of the Connexion.

The Synod rightly notes that supernumerary ministers now form a majority of those who are in Full Connexion with the Conference. Such supernumerary ministers remain in that covenant relationship with the Conference and continue to be stationed by the Conference, although this is expressed in different ways. The Ministries Committee is engaged in a piece of work which reflects on the ministry of supernumeraries, in the light of SO 792. A guidance note on best practice in this area is being prepared, with the intention that it will be circulated following the meeting of the Ministries Committee in July 2016.

The Conference therefore directs the Ministries Committee to circulate its guidance to Presbyteral Sessions of District Synods, the Convocation of the Diaconal Order and Circuit Meetings for their consideration and response.

M6 Nurturing the vocation of supernumerary ministers

The Liverpool District Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 43; Voting: unanimous), recognising that there are now more retired ministers than those in the active work, and aware of the Standing Order for supernumerary ministers to “continue as he or she is able to exercise his or her ministry in collaboration with those in the active work in the Circuit in which he or she is stationed or elsewhere by agreement with the appropriate Superintendent or Chair”, requests the Conference to consider, at all levels of the Church’s life, in what ways the vocation of ministers no longer subject to stationing might best be nurtured and enabled.

We urge that all supernumeraries should be offered discussion with an appropriate person at district or connexional level to explore what the next step of their vocational journey should be.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M5.

M7 Sabbaticals

The Bradford North (27/32) Circuit Meeting (Present: 50; Voting: 35 for, 10 against) requests that the Conference review the length, time and frequency of sabbaticals in the light of the current reduced number of ministers and current financial circumstances.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bradford North Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The Conference draws attention to the response to M11 (2015) on sabbaticals which requested the Ministries Committee to undertake a review of sabbatical policy reporting back no later than the 2017 Conference. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to note the views expressed by the Bradford North Circuit Meeting and to consider them alongside other perspectives expressed during the review.

M8 Advice and assistance regarding UK visas

The Boston (17/22) Circuit Meeting (Present: 24; Voting: unanimous) wishes to bring to the notice of the Conference the problems that have arisen for our Circuit and one of its ministers in acquiring the correct permanent visa to enable him to carry on his calling within our country.

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The Circuit asks the Conference to ensure that the necessary procedures are in place to provide appropriate advice and support to any lay people, students, presbyters and deacons who are resident here on behalf of the Church. This should include checks to ensure that the correct visas are in place, a reminder when the visa is due and appropriate advice and support for the application process.

The Circuit understands that in the past the Connexion provided a grant of up to £1,400 to assist those needing to apply for visas, but that this grant is no longer available. It asks the Conference to review this matter and explore ways to reinstate this financial assistance for those who have come to this country to serve the Church.

The Circuit regrets that the lack of financial assistance and the lack of appropriate support when problems have occurred have proved upsetting to both the minister concerned and the Circuit where he has been stationed, and asks the Conference to put in place more suitable procedures which express more clearly the Church's Christian responsibility in this matter.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Boston Circuit for its memorial; it notes that this relates to a specific case and assures the Circuit that connexional officers deal carefully with the situation relating to each individual minister who requires leave to work or remain in the UK. The discernment and selection processes ensure that the relevant checks relating to an individual's immigration status are carried out.

The policy of the Connexional Allowances Committee is that financial support is not given to ministers in the various formal stages of immigration; that the decision to wish to remain in the UK is the minister's; and that it is the whole Church which accepts some responsibility for stationing. Therefore, these costs must be borne by a combination of the minister and circuit/district/Methodist Church Fund as appropriate.

The Conference remains confident that appropriate support and guidance is in place for all those presbyters and deacons who need to obtain leave to work or remain in the UK. It understands that in addition to the advice and support that is already available on immigration matters, including the visa application process, work is underway to further equip and enable specific colleagues within the Connexional Team so that this element of this service is enhanced.

It is helpful to draw some distinctions between the different categories of individual to whom this memorial might refer. The Connexion's immigration advisor and his colleagues in the Connexional Team have a responsibility primarily for those whom the Church seeks to station connexionally.

Within this group, it is useful to draw a further distinction between those who transfer into our ministry or are Recognised and Regarded as being in Full Connexion and those who candidate for ministry in the Methodist Church in Britain. The Conference takes responsibility for funding the visas of the former group for up to the first six years that they are in the UK; after that time, they are able, if they wish, to apply for indefinite leave to remain at their own expense. The latter will already have been members of the Methodist Church in Britain for at least three years and therefore will have been responsible for their own immigration status during that time. The Conference does not take that responsibility from them at the point of candidating but will, if it is appropriate and necessary, fund a visa application for their studies, initial stationing or both. However, the Church cannot and will not accept as a candidate someone who has no legal right to remain in the UK and then seek subsequently to rectify that situation.

It is important to highlight that the Methodist Council has directed the Ministries Committee to oversee a review of the practices and policies relating to Ministers of Religion coming to Britain from overseas whom the Methodist Church sponsors under the Home Office Points Based System, with the aim of formulating a coherent and comprehensive policy relating to such ministers serving in the British Connexion.

The review will include the following areas relevant to this memorial:

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- Visa fees and their renewal; initial settlement costs; costs relating to extending and changing appointments; costs relating to returning to a sending Conference
- An assessment of the impact of receiving ministers on sending Conferences and receiving Circuits
- The expectations of ministers and Circuits
- Reflection on the need to hold together the numbers of incoming ministers, the needs of the Church and the consequential budgetary implications.

The Methodist Council has directed that the Ministries Committee report, with its recommendations as necessary, to the Council no later than January 2017.

The Conference however declines the specific requests in the memorial.

M9 Support for ministers or their partners requiring care

The York and Hull District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 120; Voting: 83 for, 18 against) draws the attention of the Conference to the needs of presbyters and deacons facing difficult care issues for either themselves or their partners. Specifically, they may face the following two situations:

- presbyters and deacons may have served as itinerant ministers for a significant part of their lives and have no property of their own but are now in need of additional care. In many cases, being in Full Connexion with the Conference, they were assured support for their lifetime, so have either not purchased property or were advised to sell or not acquire property. As such, due to the fact that local authority funding is also insufficient, they now have insufficient resources to meet the full cost of nursing or residential care provision.
- presbyters and deacons may be at a key moment in their lives and find that their marriage vows, to be together to the end of their lives, have been effectively broken due to the illness or impairment of one of the couple. This is due to the fact that the other member of the couple does not meet the eligibility criteria for local authority funding either for residential or nursing care. Because they have insufficient resources, there is inadequate provision for them to be looked after together.

The York and Hull District Synod therefore asks the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to take the following actions:

- (a) To make an assessment as to the number of presbyters and deacons for which the above two scenarios are likely to occur within the next few years.
- (b) To assess whether the current practices for ministers who have been unable to purchase property or to set aside sufficient pension reserves are sufficient and allow for a home once they are unable to adequately look after themselves.
- (c) To assess the likely cost implications of providing the additional support ministers in this situation might need.
- (d) To draw together the expertise of all possible funding bodies, such as TMCP, Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons, Methodist Ministers' Housing Society and MHA, to assess and make necessary plans to cover any revealed shortfalls in provision, so that presbyters and deacons who are married or in a civil partnership can be assured of being able to live together until death finally separates them.

Reply

The Conference thanks the York and Hull District Synod for raising these important matters which are becoming increasingly pertinent due to factors such as increased life expectancy.

A starting point for consideration of this matter is that local authorities have a statutory duty to provide appropriate residential or related care to those who need it, within a means tested framework. Such an

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assessment framework will take into account the financial position of an individual minister and their partner, including whether they have assets such as housing and savings. Individuals are not barred from receiving care because they have little or no assets. That said, due to the specific care needs of an individual and local authority funding arrangements, it is possible that a couple may be separated as provision may not be available to the partner who is not in need.

Turning to the request to make an assessment about the number of presbyters and deacons who may need residential or related care within the next few years, it is difficult to estimate the likely numbers (due to variables such as health, family history of illness and lifestyle factors), other than to say in broad terms that it is likely that support needs may increase in line with trends experienced in wider society. Therefore, it is equally difficult to identify the likely cost implications of providing support, or to give assurances that financial arrangements will be in place which ensure that couples may be able to live together until death finally separates them.

However, the Conference recognises the importance of these matters to presbyters and deacons, and therefore directs the Connexional Allowances Committee to explore them further with other interested parties, including the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society (MMHS), Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme (MMPS) and the Conference Office, and to report back to the 2018 Conference.

M10 Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper

The Borders Mission (22/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 47; Voting: 44 for, 2 against) requests that the Conference considers a revision of Standing Order 011(2)(b) regarding authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper.

Currently a Circuit cannot apply for an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper for lay employees who have some responsibility for the pastoral care of (a) local congregation(s), if they are not members in the Circuit in which they work. The Borders Mission Circuit believes that a little more flexibility in SO 011(2)(b) to permit Circuits to request authorisations when necessary for lay employees would be beneficial for the provision of the Lord's Supper in churches where a lay employee has a pastoral and preaching role. The Circuit therefore suggests the following amendment: that the words "or employees of the Circuit", be inserted after the phrase "member in the Circuit". SO 011(2)(b) would then read:

*(b) Persons nominated for authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper shall be members in the Circuit **or lay employees of the Circuit**, or deacons or probationers appointed or expected to be appointed to it. The district Policy Committee shall be provided with information as to the suitability of all persons so nominated, and shall make its recommendations to the Synod. Such information shall be provided by the Circuit Meeting in the case of members in the Circuit, by the appropriate member of the Connexional Team in the case of presbyteral probationers, and by the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order in the case of deacons and diaconal probationers.*

Reply

The Conference thanks the Borders Mission Circuit Meeting for its memorial and understands the context in which the request to amend SO 011(2)(b) arises. However, the Conference believes that an employee is in a very different kind of relationship with the Church to a member and local preacher and would therefore not be an appropriate person to be granted an authorisation to preside. Those granted an authorisation would not only need to be a member of the Methodist Church but would, by an act of the Conference, represent the Church in a particular way in being granted an authorisation that is inconsistent with an employee-employer relationship. Previous decisions of the Conference regarding the suggested link between a pastoral relationship with a congregation and presidency have indicated that the celebration of the Lord's Supper in any particular congregation or Christian community is linked to the celebration of the whole Church, which is why people who are representative of the whole Church and the Methodist

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Connexion are usually the ones to preside at that celebration, specifically set aside for a ministry of word and sacrament and pastoral responsibility.

The Conference has already refused that possibility of granting authorisations in circumstances such as lay employees appointed to have significant pastoral responsibility in a local congregation. The issue is most closely addressed in the 1996 report to the Conference *Authorisation to Preside at the Lord's Supper*, where the reason for refusing the automatic link between presidency at communion and pastoral relationship to a congregation is declared as that the Circuit and the Connexion are the context in which all congregations and Christian communities operate within Methodism, ie this is the kind of church we are. The provision of ministry in Methodism (see *The Missional Nature of the Circuit*, 2010) is made by the Conference through the Circuit – including provision for the ministry of word and sacrament. The Conference wishes to reaffirm its view that the relationship between a lay person undertaking pastoral work with a congregation and the members of that congregation does not require or make it appropriate that that person presides at the Lord's Supper in that congregation.

The Conference does not believe that anyone who is an employee is prevented from being granted an authorisation *per se* (because someone might be given an authorisation to preside as a local preacher in a Circuit even though they are employed as a part-time finance officer either in that Circuit or another Circuit), but the Conference does wish to reassert its belief that no-one should be granted an authorisation by virtue of their employment, in that presiding at Holy Communion should not be perceived as being an aspect of their lay job, as this is a role of the presbyter exercising a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M11 Secretaries of Local Preachers' Meetings

The Tynedale (20/8) Circuit Meeting (Present: 50; Voting: 49 for, 1 against) asks the Conference to review the requirement that secretaries of Local Preachers' Meetings have to be members of the Local Preachers' Meeting (Standing Order 562(1)).

The Circuit Meeting believes the requirement that a Local Preachers' Meeting secretary must be a member of the Local Preachers' Meeting, as defined in Standing Order 560(1), is leading to difficulty in recruitment of secretaries and consequently placing undue pressure on superintendent ministers.

The Circuit Meeting also believes the requirement does not permit use of the gifts of other suitably qualified or experienced members of the Circuit in fulfilling this office.

The Circuit Meeting therefore requests that the Conference amends SO 562(1) so that a member of the Circuit is appointed as the secretary of the Local Preachers' Meeting and that when the secretary is not a preacher that they attend the meeting in a non-voting capacity. If the Conference believes this is not possible or appropriate the Circuit Meeting requests an additional Standing Order be created that allows for members of the Circuit to be appointed as assistant secretaries to the Local Preachers' Meeting again in a non-voting capacity.

The Circuit Meeting noted that this memorial has the unanimous support of the Circuit's Local Preachers' Meeting.

Reply

The Conference welcomes the memorial from the Tynedale Circuit Meeting (20/8) concerning the requirement under SO 562(1) that Local Preachers' Secretaries be members of Local Preachers' Meetings. The Conference wishes both to affirm and celebrate the unique contribution of Local Preachers' Secretaries to the life and witness of the Methodist Church through their support for the ministry of local preachers.

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The Conference notes that the role of Local Preachers' Secretary is not simply administrative but has a representative function in relation to the Circuit Meeting (SO 510(1)(vi)) and a number of functions under SO 562 connected to the training of local preachers on note and on trial, and pastoral support and assistance for other local preachers which are best overseen by another local preacher. This does not preclude the meeting from obtaining administrative support from the wider Circuit.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M12 The Chester-le-Street (20/20) Circuit Meeting (Present: 22; Voting: unanimous)

This memorial was received with the same text as M11. The Conference adopts the same reply.

M13 Recognition of local preachers

The Hazel Grove and Poynton (19/14) Circuit Meeting (Present: 25; Voting: unanimous) acknowledges that any accredited local preacher who has served for 25, 40, 50, 60, 70 or 80 years may be presented with a long-service certificate signed by the President and Vice-President of the Conference.

However, many people offer as local preachers later in life and, whilst never attaining these milestones, nevertheless give the Church valuable commitment and spiritual leadership.

The Circuit understands that it is possible to download from the Methodist Church website an alternative form of long-service certificate which can be issued at a Circuit's discretion, and signed by the superintendent minister. The purpose of this certificate is "so that years of service can be recognised at any point in the ministry of a local preacher" and also "to mark occasions such as retirements or other significant milestones".

The Circuit is grateful for this development, but believes that it does not go far enough. It is the continuing ministry and development of local preachers which should be acknowledged and encouraged, not simply length of service.

Local preachers are accredited connexionally and preach locally on behalf of the whole Connexion. It is important, therefore, that the whole Connexion regularly recognises and supports local preachers' continuing commitment and thanks them for their continuing contribution to the worship life of their Circuit.

The Hazel Grove and Poynton Circuit Meeting therefore requests that the Conference direct the Methodist Council to ensure that local preacher certificates signed by the President and the Vice-President of the Conference are made available to Circuits at intervals such as 5, 10, 20, 40 ... years, to be presented to active local preachers at these intervals at appropriate circuit acts of public worship.

Reply

The Conference welcomes the memorial from the Hazel Grove and Poynton Circuit Meeting, and in particular its affirmation of the ministry of our local preachers. We give thanks for the generous contributions of many preachers to the Church through the use of their gifts and graces in worship leading and preaching.

The Conference also welcomes the acknowledgement of the need for the encouragement and support of the continuing development of local preachers. The Conference remains committed to supporting this work, most notably with the new role within the Connexional Team of an Officer for Worship and Local Preachers (in the Ministry Development Team).

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The Ministries Committee has reviewed the period of time regarded as 'long service' for local preachers recently and has introduced the 25-year certificate noting, as the memorial states, that many people offer to become a local preacher later in life. Certificates are available for 25, 40, 50, 60, 70 and 80 years. The Conference supports the recognition of many ministries in the life of the Church but suggests that changing the intervals as suggested in the memorial would devalue what might be regarded as significant long service. We note too that many other ministries in our Church are not recognised by any form of long service certificate.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M14 Support for circuit stewards

The Aire and Calder (16/17) Circuit Meeting (Present: 92; Voting: 88 for, 0 against) draws the attention of the Conference to the responsibilities carried by circuit stewards.

The Aire and Calder Circuit was formed in 2011 through the bringing together of four Circuits. The new and significantly enlarged Circuit of 32 churches and over 1,500 members makes increasing demands upon the eight circuit stewards. Alongside the superintendent minister and the rest of the circuit staff, the Circuit is dependent on their skills, enthusiasm, insights and initiatives for the Circuit's governance, strategic development and mission focus. Circuit stewards provide Circuits with their most senior lay leadership yet, in many Circuits, the recruitment of circuit stewards with the skills and time to give to the role is becoming more difficult to secure. However, without this lay leadership Circuits could not function as intended and a very different form of leadership would be required to ensure the survival of the circuit system.

Apart from the considerable flow of helpful information that comes to circuit treasurers from the Financial Services department of the Connexional Team, together with the equally helpful section, 'Managing Trustees and Methodist Money' within the Church's website, in our view circuit stewards receive only minimal support from the Connexional Team either in the form of training, systematic communication or encouragement. We believe this situation needs to change. The Circuit proposes that the Secretary of the Conference and the Methodist Council:

- (a) develop an appropriate connexionally agreed training and support system for circuit stewards;
- (b) develop a direct line of communication between the Secretary of the Conference and circuit stewards so that circuit stewards are kept up to date with significant policy, strategy and good practice development in the Methodist Church, in particular as Conference decisions affect the life of Circuits.

Reply

The Conference welcomes the memorial from the Aire and Calder Circuit Meeting regarding the duties and responsibilities of circuit stewards. The Conference particularly wishes to note and affirm the contribution and dedication of circuit stewards as senior lay leaders within the life of the Methodist Church. The Conference notes work currently under way on the redesign of circuit steward training in the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network which will be piloted during the next connexional year. The Conference also notes and wishes to encourage the practice in some Districts of gathering together groups of circuit stewards for mutual learning, sharing and support. The memorial raises some important issues about communication and the Conference therefore directs the Methodist Council to identify appropriate mechanisms for regular communication with circuit stewards on policy, strategy and good practice.

M15 Circuit assessments

The Wigan (6/5) Circuit Meeting (Present: 52; Voting: unanimous) expresses its concern that above inflation increases of the assessment from the Connexion and District are limiting the ability of the Circuit and its churches to do mission.

Reply

The Conference recognises the financial pressure faced by many of its members and expresses its gratitude for the way in which people continue to give sacrificially, and to the Wigan Circuit Meeting for highlighting this.

Memorials expressing similar concerns have been received by the Conference in recent years, leading it to direct the Methodist Council and its Strategy and Resources Committee to take them into account when bringing future proposals concerning the connexional budget. This has been evident in the careful and honest debates held by both bodies over the last year.

The methodology used to calculate the level of the Methodist Church Fund assessment is adopted every three years. The 2016 Conference was required to decide this for the three years commencing on 1 September 2017, and has taken this and other memorials into account in taking that decision. The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the budget.

M16 Connexional budget

The Bolsover and Staveley (25/11) Circuit Meeting (Present: 46; Voting: 40 for, 6 against) recognises the hard work of those who work on behalf of us all in the Connexional Team and are grateful, in particular, for the opportunities provided by the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) staff in the regions. The Circuit Meeting requests, however, that the Conference recognise the dwindling numbers in our ageing congregations, causing us to struggle financially. Therefore, we ask the Conference to reduce, or at least cap at 0%, the connexional budget that is being brought to this Conference. We are concerned that any increase will be detrimental to the resourcing of existing or future ministry in local contexts around the country, and that decisions made regarding the connexional budget be made in the knowledge that such contributions to the assessment are unsustainable.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M15.

M17 Pension contributions from lay employees

The Wirral (18/9) Circuit Meeting (Present: 61; Voting: 60 for, 0 against) requests the Conference to reduce the minimum pension contribution required to be paid by lay employees if they are also to benefit from employer contributions. Currently the minimum contribution payable by both employee and employer is 6% of salary. A consequence of this is that a number of lay employees are making no pension contributions.

The auto enrolment legislation seeks to encourage more widespread provision for pensions in two ways:

- (a) Auto enrolment to overcome the inertia that affects many people when considering pension provision, and
- (b) Setting the initial contributions at a very low level (2% of salary in total) such that few people are likely to opt out. This minimum combined employee/employer contribution increases to 5% in April 2018 and 8% in April 2019. These contribution levels will not provide a very substantial pension but will hopefully set people on a path to making a more adequate provision at a later date.

Our current requirement results in either a combined contribution of 12% of salary or more, or no contribution at all. We believe the Church should follow the lead of the auto enrolment legislation and provide greater encouragement than is currently the case for lay employees to make pension contributions. This could be achieved with a simple amendment to the current requirements whereby the minimum employee contribution is set at 2% of salary. The minimum employer contribution would remain at 6% and the combined contribution rate of 8% will meet the auto enrolment requirements for 2019 and beyond. Employing bodies should be asked to encourage their lay employees to make higher contributions (and may

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wish to offer financial incentives to do so) recognising that in current economic circumstances even a combined contribution of 12% is far from adequate to provide a satisfactory pension for most people.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wirral Circuit Meeting for drawing its attention to the important matter of pension provision for lay employees. This is only one aspect of the duty of care that employing bodies have towards their staff, and the Conference reminds trustees that they need to ensure that they can meet these obligations when appointing any employees. Appropriate contracts should be signed with all employees and the processes outlined in Standing Order 570 must be followed in full.

Ensuring that people will have adequate pension provision when they retire is a significant issue within society in general. Estimating the appropriate amount to pay into a pension scheme depends on a wide range of factors, but one rule of thumb advocated by www.moneysavingexpert.com is that someone with no previous pension savings should aim for a percentage of their salary that is equal to half their age, so someone aged 32 should aim for 16% of their salary and someone aged 40 should aim for 20%.

It is this reasoning which lies behind the Conference's current position that Methodist employing bodies should ensure that a minimum of 12% is paid into any pension scheme, shared equally between employee and employer. The Conference seeks to encourage a high standard of employment practices; hence the rule that all employees must be paid at least the Living Wage. Since the Conference determined the level of 12%, life expectancy has continued to rise, meaning that for many employees the level of 12% is insufficient – as noted by the Wirral Circuit. Auto enrolment legislation has also been introduced since the Conference set this policy.

The Conference refers this memorial to the Methodist Council and directs that it undertakes a review of the minimum pension contribution levels by employees and employers for lay employees, to report back to the 2018 Conference.

M18 Employer-only pension contributions for lay employees

The Nottingham (South) (22/2) Circuit Meeting (Present: 24; Voting: unanimous) calls upon the Conference to urgently review its decision of 1999 regarding contributions to a pension scheme for both employer and lay employees. It notes that the changing landscape of pensions legislation, the issues of auto-enrolment and employer debt liability upon withdrawal from a scheme (a cessation event) cause this Circuit, and possibly others more generally, great difficulty in managing the costs of involvement in a pension scheme.

It therefore asks the Conference to permit Methodist Church employing bodies to enter into employer-only contribution arrangements where employees have exercised their right not to opt in or to join a pension scheme and as a result the employer is, either immediately or in the foreseeable future, at risk of incurring a cessation event liability.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Nottingham (South) Circuit Meeting and refers its memorial to the Methodist Council to be considered as part of the review set up in response to memorial M17.

M19 Information on connexional expenditure

The Sheffield District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 66; Voting: 39 for, 13 against) notes that the Circuits in the Sheffield District are all embarked, in different ways, on a journey 'from Maintenance to Mission'.

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However, there is concern in a significant number of the Circuits that they are supporting a connexional expenditure which is not well understood, which appears to have limited equivalence in the newer independent churches, and the cost of which may no longer be shared equitably between Districts whose financial circumstances will have changed. Our request to the Conference has two aspects:

- we believe that it would be really helpful to individual churches and their members to see a simple pie chart or similar breakdown with brief explanation, so that Circuits and churches can have a meaningful overview of how and why money is spent.
- we believe that it is important to review the formula presently used to calculate the connexional shares paid by each District, and, bearing in mind that each District which 'pays too much' is subsidising those who are 'better off', we believe that any rebalancing process should remove the burden on poorer Districts over a period of not more than two years. We recognise, though, the potential problems associated with a sudden increase for any Circuit, and therefore suggest that any increases are phased in over a longer period (eg four years), with any shortfall being covered from connexional reserves.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sheffield District Synod for raising these important matters regarding the effective stewardship of financial resources. One of the ways in which the Church expresses its connexionalism is via the use of the funds which comprise the connexional central services budget. These funds are dependent on income from across the Connexion; primarily via the Methodist Church Fund (MCF) assessment, donations from Local Churches, Circuits and individuals, and levies on property sales. Transparency of the use of these funds is therefore extremely important and the Conference directs that an accessible summary report should be produced and made available.

One important factor in both parts of this memorial is the transparency available to churches regarding the composition of 'the assessment'. The majority of the assessment required of them is not paid to the MCF, but is the cost of ordained ministry, with significant increases in recent years relating to ministerial pension costs. The Conference encourages Circuit Meetings to make such information clear and transparent to their individual churches.

The apportionment of the MCF assessment between the Districts is undertaken annually, currently based on the numbers of ministers and lay employees in each District. This is discussed and agreed in draft form each August by the annual meeting of the District Treasurers' Practitioner Forum. This must be completed during August, so that circuit and church budgets can be calculated in good time using the resultant figures. Annual shifts in the proportion required from each District can be surprisingly large, as circumstances alter from year-to-year. In recent years a cap and collar mechanism has been used to ensure that no Districts face large increases or reductions in any single year. The existing process does enable Districts that feel that their level of reserves would allow them to contribute a greater share to offer to do so, and the Conference encourages such expressions of connexional generosity.

The Conference sees this process as an integral part of the Church's connexional nature, so agrees that it must be undertaken as equitably as possible. It also recognises the potential level of detail that could be involved, with the associated amount of time and effort required to collect data from Districts and collate it within the Connexional Team. The Conference believes that the current process by which District Treasurers collaborate to produce a mutually acceptable result is the most effective one. It understands that the method of apportionment is kept under regular review.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the contents of this memorial are taken into account when future apportionments are proposed. The Conference notes that the apportionment for 2017/18 will need to be agreed in August 2016, and therefore any significant change in methodology will not take effect until the MCF assessment to be paid in 2018/19.

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The Conference directs the Methodist Council to oversee the production of an accessible summary report relating to the Consolidated Accounts for the year ending 31 August 2016, once it has adopted them, and to ensure that the report is available on the Methodist website.

M20 Transparency of information regarding Methodist charitable funds

The Stamford and Rutland (23/22) Circuit Meeting (Present: 27; Voting: unanimous) is aware of the several connexional funds which Local Churches are encouraged to support, namely:

- All We Can
- Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust
- Methodist Homes for the Aged
- Fund for World Mission
- Mission in Britain Fund
- Property Fund
- Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons

Each play their part in alleviating need and encouraging the full mission of the church. However, we believe that it is vital that information is transparently available with regard to the state of the several funds, thus highlighting their comparative level of need, if churches are expected to choose which funds to support. Such information would enable Local Churches to make an informed decision as to how best to donate to any of the several funds thus helping them to be the best stewards of the financial resources with which they are entrusted by supporting the funds *in greatest need*.

We therefore propose that the Methodist Conference directs the managers of the several connexional funds (noted above) to produce annually a simple pack giving clear information about the funds managed by the Methodist Church and how the monies are used by them, in addition to the larger Annual Report of the Methodist Church, thus enabling churches and Circuits to best discern how to apportion their giving between the funds according to their relative needs.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Stamford and Rutland Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for drawing attention to a range of funds that use donations in order to further God's mission.

It is important to clarify that not all of those listed are connexional funds and that the way in which information is made available depends on the type of fund and its usage.

All We Can is a registered charity overseen by its own trustees on behalf of the Conference. In addition to its statutory accounts it produces an informative annual review which is available at <http://www.allwecan.org.uk/annual-reporting/annual-report>.

Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) is also a registered charity overseen by its own trustees, independent of the Conference. It produces an annual impact statement which is available at http://www.mha.org.uk/files/6714/5347/8328/MHA_Impact_Statement_2015_Web_Version.pdf.

The Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust (LWPT) has Methodist heritage, but is an independent ecumenical charity that seeks to work across denominations.

The World Mission Fund, the Mission in Britain Fund and the Fund for Property are all connexional funds from which grants are made by the Connexional Grants Committee on behalf of the Conference. A special One Mission Matters 'Thank you' report is produced annually to highlight some of the projects supported

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from these funds with summary details of their income and expenditure. The 2016 edition is now available and is commended to the wider Connexion.

The Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons is overseen by the Connexional Allowances Committee, with a summary of its use included in that committee's annual report to the Conference. It is an important expression of the Church's connexional care for ministers, being used to support them and their families facing hardship, whether in training, the active work or supernumerary.

The newly-formed Engagement team within the Connexional Team is actively reviewing the way in which giving to connexional funds and their use via connexional grants is communicated across the Church. The Conference therefore believes that sufficient information is in the public domain as outlined above in order to assist churches, Circuits and individuals to direct their giving to where it is most needed. The Conference declines the memorial.

M21 Accounting software

The South Molton and Ringsash (24/22) Circuit Meeting (Present: 39; Voting: 34 for, 3 against) asks the Conference to direct connexional officers to authorise the development of a computerised accounts program set on a base of Windows 7 and above and compatible with both the short and the long version of the Standard Form of Accounts for the use of churches and Circuits. The Circuit Meeting further asks officers to direct that the program be available as of 1 September 2017, and include the facility to produce the Standard Form of Accounts thereafter automatically, subject to updates available online through the Methodist website.

Reply

The Conference appreciates the time and commitment that is given across the Connexion by treasurers in order to ensure that annual accounts are prepared and presented in accordance with Charity Law, and thanks the South Molton and Ringsash Circuit Meeting for suggesting the provision of a program to assist in this.

The Conference does not believe that it is appropriate to initiate the development of accounting software, specifically for use within the Church, recognising the capacity and expertise that this would require and the wide diversity of practices already in use by treasurers across the Connexion.

However, the Conference agrees that adding the facility to produce and submit electronically both the short and long version of the Methodist Standard Form of Accounts would be useful. It directs the Methodist Council, therefore, to oversee an evaluation of the potential development of such a program, and if appropriate to initiate it. It recognises, however, that the deadline of 1 September 2017 is unlikely to be realistic. In addition to development time, which would include identifying a suitable supplier, it is vital that a selection of treasurers is able to provide input to both the design and implementation of the program to ensure that it is as user-friendly and effective as possible. Such work is also not included within the 2016/17 budget.

The Conference therefore directs the Methodist Council to oversee this work, with a target implementation date of 1 September 2018.

M22 Systems for recording safeguarding cases

In light of the revised guidance *Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church*, the Southend and Leigh (34/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 43; Voting: unanimous) recommends and requests that the Methodist Church develops a secure connexional online system for safeguarding recording and reporting to ensure consistent and effective compliance with data protection legislation, and good practice. This system could be part of the Methodist online suite.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Southend and Leigh Circuit Meeting for highlighting the importance of storing the required safeguarding information and that this be in a secure and compliant environment.

The revised guidance *Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church* should be followed across the Connexion and is available on the Church website at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1517149/Safeguarding%20recording%20guidance16%2012%2014.pdf>.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to oversee an investigation of the potential feasibility and cost of a system as described in the memorial and to report back no later than the 2018 Conference.

M23 Connexional requirements upon office holders

The Birmingham (West) and Oldbury (5/6) Circuit Meeting (Present: 32; Voting: unanimous) notes that Church Councils are increasingly finding that connexional requirements placed on local officers, in terms of knowledge, time and computer skills, are excessively demanding. The Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to bear in mind that much financial, property and statistical form-filling is willingly undertaken by people who give of their limited time freely, but we feel that the burden is becoming increasingly onerous. Churches may well feel better supported if clearer and more accessible guidance were given by the Connexion, perhaps in the form of model policies which could form the basis for local officers to formulate their own individual responses.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham (West) and Oldbury Circuit Meeting for its memorial and recognises the time and commitment shown across the Connexion by office holders, the majority of whom are volunteers.

The preparation of accounts under Standing Order 012 and of property schedules under Standing Order 941 are both matters of effective Christian stewardship and satisfying statutory requirements. The Church has adopted a Standard Form of Accounts in order to ensure compatibility of approach and requirements across the Connexion. The Conference notes that specific training has been offered to circuit and district treasurers during 2016, with a particular emphasis on the introduction of new accounting law for charities under the FRS 102 SORP. The use of online property schedules means that standing data does not have to be re-entered every year and provides the officers who have responsibilities for property at circuit or district level a complete picture of their area. This facilitates decision-making about the development and use of property for mission and ministry. Similarly, the annual statistics for mission data is available via the Methodist website to assist in mission planning locally.

Each area of data gathering has its own guidance notes and the facility for the relevant members of the Connexional Team to be contacted with specific queries. The Conference feels this is sufficient, but directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Connexional Team continues to engage actively with local office holders in order to ensure that the interactive websites are as user-friendly as possible.

M24 Circuits in tragedy and crisis

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 117; Voting: unanimous) draws the attention of the Conference to the small but seemingly growing number of Circuits facing the tragedy and crisis of one of their ministers in the active work dying suddenly or being diagnosed with critical illness and the impact this has on the circuit ministry team and the Circuit as a whole.

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We request that the Conference directs the Methodist Council through an appropriate means to consider the pastoral and practical implications of such situations, including speaking to those who have been through this, so that experience can be gathered and guidance can be given to enable practice to be improved.

In particular, the Synod is concerned that:

- (a) minister(s), lay staff and the Circuit feel supported, valued and 'not forgotten' by the District and relevant connexional officers as they go through the crisis and tragedy;
- (b) the spiritual and physical well-being of minister(s) and lay people who lead the Circuit is safeguarded as they cope with their own grief and minister in the Circuit, by ensuring space is provided for reflection and pastoral support; and
- (c) care is taken that resources available to support those affected are reiterated to individuals and Circuits, so that all who would benefit from them have access to them.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod for raising the issue of the support available to individuals and Circuits when a minister in the active work suddenly dies or is diagnosed with a critical illness. In such circumstances it is important that individuals have access to appropriate support in a timely way.

In times of difficulty access to counselling is often helpful. All ministers, their spouses and any adult (over 18) children living in the manse are entitled to access the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service (CMCS) for support. This can usually be arranged fairly quickly, and is generally available within a reasonable travelling distance of the person concerned. Individuals are entitled to up to 12 sessions free of charge (and may make a voluntary donation towards the cost if they wish). The cost is covered by the Methodist Medical Benevolent Fund.

In addition, Circuits and Districts may wish to organise counselling for those who are not eligible to receive this from the CMCS, such as lay employees or volunteers. Connexional funding is not available for this, but appropriately qualified counsellors may be identified via registering bodies such as the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. Sometimes it is possible for the costs relating to this to be met or partly met from District Benevolent Funds, or similar local sources.

It may be possible to organise professional group support sessions for those dealing with trauma within Circuits or Districts, if this intervention could be deemed as beneficial. Applications for connexional funding may be considered in such circumstances.

Along with this provision, connexional guidance which sets out the funding and other support available to spouses or civil partners when a minister dies in the active work is in the process of being drawn up. In doing this it is recognised that the bereaved person has much to cope with at a very difficult time, and the aim in producing the guidance is to make this as clear and simple a process as possible. This information will be made available to the bereaved spouse as soon as possible, with contact information for relevant connexional officers who will be able to help with matters such as removal grants, housing and situations of financial hardship.

The *Good Practice Guidelines for Supporting Ministers with Ill health* (Parts 1 and 2) adopted by the Conference in 2011 and 2013 respectively also contain much useful information about how to support ministers, their families and Circuits when an individual becomes ill. The guidance includes practical measures which may be taken, along with case studies, and the Conference commends these to the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod for their further consideration.

The Connexional Wellbeing Adviser is also available to give advice and support where this would be helpful, either directly to affected individuals or via the superintendent or District Chair.

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In addition to these connexional measures, it is of course important that local resources and support are made available. Sometimes these can be accessed via the NHS or local voluntary sector bodies, or they may be more appropriately offered within the Circuit or District in a pastoral context. Inevitably when and how this support is offered will depend upon the affected individual's specific needs and the local situation, and must be offered in a sensitive and appropriate way by suitably skilled individuals. This may include practical support, or measures such as allowing affected individuals time away from ministry to grieve.

The Conference is content that the measures and guidance above provide an appropriate level of support for individuals and directs Districts to reiterate information about available resources to those affected by such bereavements. However the Conference recognises that the question of support for the circuit – that is, for the affected circuit as a community – has not been addressed and directs the Ministries Committee to create a small group to listen to circuits affected in this way and consider what form additional support would take in order to address the issues raised. The group should report through the Ministries Committee to the 2017 Conference.

M25 Order of service for baptisms

The South East Northumberland Ecumenical Area (20/6) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38; Voting: unanimous) requests the Conference to:

- (a) rewrite the baptismal order of service in a contemporary/modern style;
- (b) ensure the copyright is with the Methodist Church.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South East Northumberland Ecumenical Area for its memorial and celebrates its desire to be faithful to our Methodist heritage and practice.

While it might be desirable in theory for the Methodist Church to own copyright on all worship resources, this is unfortunately not realistic. For instance, even the use of the 'modern' version of the Lord's Prayer is subject to copyright owned by the English Language Liturgical Consultation and its reproduction must comply with their conditions. Material from the *Methodist Worship Book* was for a time made available electronically through a product called Visual Liturgy and further consideration needs to be given to meeting the demand for on-screen and other electronic uses.

The orders of service contained within the *Methodist Worship Book* have been authorised by the Methodist Conference for use in the Methodist Church, but it is not a requirement that they are always used. Within the diversity of the Methodist Church in Britain there are many contexts within which some adaptation or alternative expression of language may be felt to be appropriate and it is not uncommon for authorised liturgies to be adapted for use in a particular situation, or for alternative liturgies or resources from a variety of different contexts to be employed. There are a variety of resources available. If orders of service are adapted, or alternative resources used, then the requirements of SO 010(A) should be noted; particularly the requirement that at every baptism the following words shall be said when water is poured on the candidate or the candidate is dipped in water: *N, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (SO 010(A)(4)).*

Texts that have been authorised by the Conference for use hold an important place in the life of the Methodist Church as they provide a shared understanding of aspects of Methodist theology and practice. The *Methodist Worship Book* contains four orders of service that involve baptism, each to be used in different circumstances, and all follow a similar structure. This structure reflects an important theological principle because it highlights the Methodist emphasis on prevenient grace: God's grace that is extended to us before we can make any response to it. Thus, in the Methodist orders of service, the promises follow the baptism and are in response to the divine act.

Given the resources that are already available, the guidance and texts within the *Methodist Worship Book*, and the diversity of contemporary British Methodism, the Conference does not believe it is appropriate to produce new orders of service for baptism at this time; but directs the Faith and Order Committee to produce some alternative baptism resources in accessible language that adhere to the structure of the authorised texts and thus retain the Methodist emphasis on prevenient grace. The Conference also directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Connexional Team gives further consideration to appropriate ways of making existing resources available in electronic formats and for on-screen use.

M26 TMCP

The Nottingham and Derby District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 127; Voting: unanimous) is aware that following memorial M22 (2015) conversations have been taking place between TMCP and the Connexional Team, which it trusts will lead to a positive outcome. Nevertheless, the Synod wishes to record the continuing difficulties reported by most of its Circuits in matters involving TMCP. The concerns are as follows:

1. Delays: The Synod is aware that TMCP's personnel have high workloads and cannot always respond swiftly. Nevertheless, slow response times are a concern because they can lead to the loss of transactions, or to churches or Circuits failing to respond in a timely fashion to legal claims. The Synod believes that TMCP needs either:

- (a) more staff; or
- (b) to reduce its workload by having less active involvement in matters on which the church or Circuit's own solicitors are acting.

2. Amendments: TMCP frequently say that they cannot give advice, only guidance, and therefore that churches and Circuits need to instruct their own solicitors. However, it is the experience of churches, Circuits and their solicitors that the guidance often takes the form of making a great many amendments to documents drafted by the solicitors. This is so even when the solicitors have many years of experience of working with TMCP. Clearly, if the documentation does not comply with Methodist polity or charity law, then it does need to be corrected. However, churches, Circuits and their solicitors report that some of the amendments are minor, or cosmetic, or make no substantive change, or contradict amendments made by other TMCP staff. The approach contributes to delays, and the duplication of work adds to the expense. The Synod believes that TMCP needs either:

- (a) to be constituted so as to undertake the legal work themselves; or
- (b) to supply their required clauses at the outset and then have less active involvement in the details of the transaction.

3. Accountability: The Synod notes that, when acting as the custodian trustee, the Board and staff of TMCP have no direct accountability to the Conference. The Synod believes that this is unhelpful. In other cases where Methodist-related organisations have no accountability to the Conference (such as Methodist Insurance plc), churches and Circuits can choose to take their business elsewhere if dissatisfied. This is not true of TMCP. The Synod does however note that, in most of the instances that cause difficulties, TMCP is not acting purely as custodian trustee but is fulfilling the role of the Connexional Team under Standing Order 931(3), which provides that: "All contracts relating to property, conveyances, leasehold agreements, sharing agreements, deeds and declarations of every kind shall be forwarded in draft to the Connexional Team for inspection and approval before being signed." The Synod therefore asks that both:

- (a) the Law and Polity Committee look at whether the Board of TMCP can be made accountable to the Conference; and
- (b) the Connexional Team make workable arrangements, through TMCP or otherwise, for the inspection and approval of documentation under SO 931(3).

Reply

The Conference thanks the Nottingham and Derby District Synod for its memorial which raises important points about the level of support and advice available to Managing Trustees. The memorial further touches on a more fundamental question of the use of the resources of the whole Connexion in respect of the use of property for mission as well as focusing the attention of the Conference on the role and function of the custodian trustee.

Some of the points raised in the memorial have been the subject of conversations which were initiated as a result of memorial M22 to the 2015 Conference which directed the Methodist Council to enter into discussions with the Board and Chief Executive of TMCP in order to find ways to continue to improve the service provided to the Connexion. (The Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive have been part of these conversations with the Secretary of the Conference and the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice.) Careful monitoring of case work undertaken by direction of the Board shows that overall response times by TMCP staff have improved and this is due in no small part to the commitment of TMCP staff for which the Conference wishes to express its gratitude. Other generic issues of how the whole Connexion can better realise the missional opportunities offered by a large and diverse range of properties have been considered by the Methodist Council when it established a new Property Development Committee.

As this work has progressed it has become clear that some of the changes brought about by the Team Focus process have resulted in a much more limited provision of property advice from the Connexional Team to Managing Trustees. This has resulted in a lack of clarity for Managing Trustees when they are seeking advice on a range of property-related matters. Early, clear and coherent advice on planning, legal and technical matters is essential if Trustees are to be supported. Whilst there is an effective and dedicated group of District Property Secretaries willing to share experiences, this is reliant on volunteer posts and does not enable the provision of a strategic approach to the significant missional assets of the whole Connexion. The absence of a comprehensive property support function has resulted in a lack of clarity on which body is responsible for the formation of policy. This, when coupled with the functions undertaken by TMCP on behalf of the Connexional Team in order to fulfil the provisions of SO 931(3) can all too easily and all too often result in staff of TMCP needing to seek a ruling on policy from officers of the Conference and the Council. In some cases, and in seeking to support particular schemes, staff in both the Team and TMCP find themselves being called upon to offer advice on areas of work that would benefit from clearer policy decisions. Such a combination of tasks contributes to confusion for Managing Trustees and a lack of clarity for both staff at TMCP and within the Connexional Team.

The Conference reminds the Synod that the TMCP Board is accountable to the Conference via the annual report which the Board submits to the Conference. Furthermore, it is the Conference which appoints members of the Board, each of whom is required to be either a member of the Methodist Church or a minister in Full Connexion with the Conference.

In recognition of the need to be faithful in the use of the resources of the whole Connexion, the Conference accepts the need to review the role of TMCP, directing the Methodist Council and inviting the Board of TMCP to consider the points raised in the memorial by appointing a joint working party to:

- (a) Clarify the extent of the application of SO 931(3) and the role and responsibility of the custodian trustee under the Methodist Church Act 1939 and charity law.
- (b) Clarify the need for SO 931(3) in its current form and where appropriate suggest amendments.
- (c) Assess what steps are necessary to ensure that the Connexional Team has available to it an appropriate level of resource so as to fulfil the terms of SO 931(3).
- (d) Clarify the requirements placed upon Managing Trustees in respect of disposals and contracts and identify ways to speed up transactions, taking into account the views of the Law and Polity Committee on the role of the custodian.
- (e) Clarify and define respective areas of responsibility so as to resource the mission and ministry of the whole Connexion most effectively.

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- (f) Establish a full review of the needs of Managing Trustees in terms of property and legal advice and consider the benefit of professional legal services being provided by the Connexional Team.

The Conference further directs the Methodist Council to bring a report on the progress of this work to the 2017 Conference and delegates to the Council responsibility for appointing two members of the working party. The Conference invites the Board of TMCP to appoint two members of the working party.

The Conference appoints Mrs Susan R Howdle to chair the proposed working group.

Reasoned Statement Susan Howdle is a past Vice-President of the Conference, and a former member of the TMCP board.

M27 TMCP

The Ceredigion (2/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 16; Voting: unanimous) notes the length of time that is taken for responses to queries and enquiries made to the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) regarding property.

The Circuit therefore – acknowledging the independence of TMCP – requests that the Conference uses its influence and resources to encourage TMCP to make its processes and response times quicker, so as to allow Local Churches and Circuits to more fully be discipleship movements shaped for mission.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Ceredigion Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The Conference is aware that in recent years the Board of TMCP has overseen a number of reviews to ensure that its processes and response times provide the highest and most timely level of support to Managing Trustees. There are occasions when staff are required to deal with a high volume of work on time scales beyond their control.

The point raised in the memorial has been the subject of conversations which were initiated as a result of Memorial M22 of the 2015 Conference which directed the Methodist Council to enter into discussions with the Board and Chief Executive of TMCP in order to find ways to continue to improve the service provided to the Connexion.

Whilst this work is ongoing, the Conference is of the opinion that a more fundamental review of the way that Managing Trustees are supported in respect of the care and development of property is now required. As such, the Conference accepts the memorial and directs the Methodist Council to consider it as part of the work directed in the response to M26.

M28 TMCP

The Nottingham (Trent Valley) (22/4) Circuit Meeting (Present: 42; Voting: unanimous) is concerned to hear from its officers of continued delays in property matters caused by apparent excessive delays in communication within TMCP and between TMCP and the Circuit. However, it understands from the reply to Memorial M22 (2015), that “The Conference has no power to direct either the Board or staff of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) either in terms of budget provision or operational matters.” It therefore sees little point in drawing to the attention of the Conference the fact that Circuits continue to be hampered in their mission by the failure of the Board of TMCP to address such systemic problems which, from conversations across the Connexion, it believes to be far from isolated incidents.

The Circuit Meeting further understands that the members of the Trust board are appointed for life by the Trust itself, reflecting the model of trusteeship for Local Churches which was rejected as unfit for purpose around 40 years ago, and that the Trust Deed of TMCP dates from 1939.

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It therefore requests the Conference to direct the Law and Polity Committee to make a preliminary assessment of the feasibility of a radical reformation of the relationship between the Conference and the custodian trustees of Model Trust property so that those Trustees are accountable to the Conference for the performance of their duties.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M29 TMCP

The Southend and Leigh (34/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 43; Voting: 39 for, 0 against) wishes to raise the problem of the delays in dealing with TMCP, and require and request additional resources for TMCP and to bring control of TMCP into the Connexional Team.

Further, we would request that TMCP look at its working practices, to speed up dealing with cases, maybe by having individual email addresses and contact numbers for case workers, and embedding their replies into emails rather than emailing a written letter. A phone conference with a case worker could prevent the elongated toing and froing of emailed letters, with long delays between the replies, and speed the whole process up.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M30 Governance of work requiring technical expertise

The West London Mission Circuit is a Circuit managing work requiring significant technical expertise. The origin of the seven professional social work services that we run is in the Forward Movement, championed by the Revd Hugh Price Hughes in the 1880s, which sought to transform the mission of the Church in some of the poorest parts of our cities. When it established this work, the Methodist Church of the time took the risk of changing existing Standing Orders and practices, in order to work in new ways and new places. The WLM now manages a budget of £2.6 million and employs some 70 staff, but the churches within the Circuit are struggling to provide appropriate governance as we continue to seek to respond to the transforming good news of God's love in Christ and to embody it in our life and work.

Standing Order 503(1) lists those eligible for appointment to office or membership of official meetings in Circuits. We are aware that we are not the only Circuit that finds it challenging to appoint sufficient people to committees with governance responsibilities. Declining membership, the increasing number of commitments people have outside the Church and a reluctance to commit to sharing in leadership and governance, are limiting the pool of people available with the requisite technical expertise.

We have measures in place to manage the risks we face, and oversee the social work appropriately, but do not believe this is sustainable in the long term. At present, we do not wish to make the social work into a separate charity, since this has the potential to undermine its Methodist identity and we believe this part of our heritage continues to provide significant missional opportunities.

Therefore, the West London Mission (35/2) Circuit Meeting (Present: 19; Voting: unanimous), requests the Conference:

- To allow a Circuit involved in managing work requiring significant technical expertise and making a reasonable case of the need to mitigate risk, to obtain permission from the District Synod to appoint no more than a third of the voting members of the relevant body outside Standing Order 503(1).
- If this is not considered appropriate, to help the West London Mission Circuit to find an alternative solution.

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- In the longer term, to look at how this Standing Order relates to the changing nature of the Church, and the management of risk, without undermining our Methodist identity.

Reply

The Conference thanks the West London Mission Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The Conference encourages Church Councils to utilise the broad provision of SO 503(1)(iii) that seeks to enable all participants in the life of a Local Church to share in the furthering of the mission of the Church through its various committees. The Conference recognises the particular circumstances of the West London Mission Circuit but also the increasing difficulty to find people willing to serve on committees and thereby accept the resulting responsibilities and time commitments involved.

The Conference declines the memorial.

M31 Use of local church benevolence funds by deacons

The Chester-le-Street (20/20) Circuit Meeting (Present: 22; Voting: unanimous) asks the Conference to amend Standing Order 651(3) to allow local church benevolence funds to be distributed by (and at the discretion of) deacons and probationer deacons, and not only by presbyters, as the current provision requires.

Standing Order 651 recognises the important role played by the Local Church in the relief of poverty and distress in the congregation and neighbourhood. This Circuit believes that deacons and probationer deacons are often at the forefront of the Church's work among the poor and needy and that therefore the current requirements of the Standing Order both limit the ability of deacons to minister effectively and also lead to unnecessary delay in meeting the Church's stated purpose of alleviating poverty and distress.

The Circuit Meeting therefore requests that the Conference amends SO 651(3) to read "at the confidential discretion of a minister of the local church" or, if the Conference feels this is not appropriate, to amend the Standing Order to specifically enable the fund to be distributed by deacons and probationer deacons.

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Chester-le-Street Circuit for its memorial and for reminding the Church of the importance of benevolence funds in the mission of a Local Church and Circuit.

The memorial raises an issue concerning different aspects of the roles of ordained ministers. Whereas it is likely that where a deacon is in post in a Circuit, he or she will come into contact with those in need and therefore may well wish to call upon the resources of the church's benevolence fund, a deacon will not be in pastoral charge in a church (as would a presbyter) nor have pastoral responsibility preparatory to taking pastoral charge (as would a probationer presbyter). At present, the Standing Order places responsibility for the benevolence fund with the presbyter as part of his or her oversight of the mission of the Local Church.

The Conference is reluctant to break that link and therefore declines the specific request in the memorial. However, it recognises that a deacon might well have a role to play in the distribution of benevolence fund monies and therefore directs the Law and Polity Committee to give expression to this by drafting a revision to Standing Order 651(3).

M32 Use of church buildings by other churches

The Coventry and Nuneaton (5/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 55; Voting: unanimous) rejoices in the vibrant diversity of the Christian Church in Britain today. Across the area covered by the Circuit, it is aware of Christians engaged in worship and mission in a variety of styles and coming from a variety of cultures,

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languages and traditions. As the people called Methodist, we seek to be the 'friends of all and the enemies of none'.

At the same time, the Circuit is engaged in reviewing its resources that they may best be used for mission and the work of the kingdom in our 21st century world. In some places, this has meant sale of buildings, but in other places more creative and collaborative approaches, together with our sisters and brothers of other traditions, are appropriate. This is particularly the case when dealing with more modern buildings where a multiplicity of different uses – some clearly Christian and others more general – of the same set of premises can be contemplated.

The Circuit Meeting is concerned that, at present, Clause 14(2A) of Part 2 of the Model Trusts prevents Managing Trustees from making arrangements to allow Christians of other churches or congregations to use Methodist premises, or parts of them, for worship for periods exceeding 12 months. It is aware that informally a variety of methods have been used to allow such use for longer periods. However, in the rich and varied context of Britain today, the Circuit Meeting believes that being able to conclude formal longer term leases and licences with fellow Christians of other traditions may be part of the best way of serving the work of the kingdom in a particular area. It believes this should be possible whether or not the Methodist people of the area have current need of a particular building for worship.

The Circuit Meeting therefore requests the Conference to amend Clause 14(2A) to allow longer term arrangements. It suggests that a revised version might be:

(2A) Notwithstanding that any of the members of any church or congregation hereinafter mentioned may not subscribe to the doctrinal standards, the managing trustees may with the consent of such person or persons as the Conference may by Standing Order prescribe permit the use of a place of worship or any other premises comprised in the property by members of one or more Christian churches or congregations, either for particular occasions or for a period which shall not in any case exceed twelve months, provided that (i) such permission shall be given only upon terms that it is revocable by the managing trustees and (ii) such consent as aforesaid shall be given only in cases where to grant such permission would not (having regard to all the circumstances) offend the doctrinal standards.

The person or persons prescribed by the Conference shall however on written application by the managing trustees have authority to allow the granting of a more permanent occupancy to a body referred to above including the letting, renting or leasing of the property, or part of the property, in the manner authorised in paragraph 16(e) where local circumstances require it.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The Conference appreciates that the requirements of Model Trust 14(2A) mean that no security of tenure can at present be offered to another Christian church or congregation unless such a church is able and willing to enter into a Sharing Agreement under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969.

The intention of Model Trust 14(2A) was to enable other Christian churches and congregations who did not wish to commit to a long-term agreement to use Methodist premises and to ensure that managing trustees know that no person, service or meeting for religious worship denies or repudiates the doctrinal standards as required by Model Trust 14(3).

The Conference recognises that there are ongoing questions around the application of Model Trust 14(2A), particularly in respect of what is required in terms of a continuing local Methodist church when a licence is granted. The Conference also recognises that there are cases where worship by other Christian churches or congregations in part of a set of Methodist premises need not in any way impinge on Methodist worship in or other use of the remainder. Therefore, whilst declining the proposal to amend Model Trust 14(2A) at

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present in the form suggested, the Conference directs the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to provide guidance on the application and use of Model Trust 14(2A) both in terms of its flexibility and limitations. The Conference also directs the Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to consider whether it is desirable to make any amendments to Model Trust 14(2A) and to bring any recommendations to the 2018 Conference.

M33 Authorisation of same-sex marriage in LEPs

The South Lakes (9/14) Circuit Meeting (Present: 22; Voting: 18 for, 4 against), while recognising the ongoing work of the Methodist Church on the matter of Equal Marriage, draws the Conference's attention to the decisions of the Baptist Union and the likely one of the United Reformed Church that deciding to register to perform Same-Sex Marriage (or not) rests with the local Church Meeting. Legislation requires the assent to the application for such registration from each denomination using a building. Without the authorisation of the Conference, partner churches may not seek such registration.

Noting that in Local Ecumenical Partnerships it is normally the case that any authorised service of any partner is permitted but that in this case further authority is required, the Circuit asks the Conference to authorise the registration of buildings for Same Sex Marriage on request of a Congregational Church Meeting where a partner church in an LEP would permit it, and where the building is owned by that partner church, providing such registration is done only in the name of the partner denomination.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South Lakes Circuit Meeting for its consideration of the impact on some of our ecumenical partners of particular decisions of the Methodist Church about same sex marriage and for its memorial.

The report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group is before the 2016 Conference and refers to the subject of the memorial in sections 2.4 and 3.4.

The memorial refers to the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church. The Conference understands that the Baptist Union of Great Britain has recognised that it cannot, as a national body, 'opt in' to the same sex marriage legislation in England and Wales because Baptist ecclesiology requires that the appropriate religious authority in a case like this is the local church meeting. The Conference also notes that in March 2016, the Baptist Council urged its churches to refrain from registering.

The Conference is aware that on 27 June 2015 the United Reformed Church held an extraordinary meeting of its General Assembly. The Assembly decided to seek ratification by the Synods of a number of policies on the marriage of same sex couples by the formal process it uses for constitutional change. This has been going on over the past year and can only be completed at the General Assembly when it meets in the days following the Conference.

The Working Party on Marriage and Civil Partnerships clarified in its report to the Conference in 2014, at paragraph 12, that "where the use of premises is shared between two or more denominations [...], then no application can be made to register the building for same sex marriage unless the "relevant governing authority" of each of those denomination consents." For the Methodist Church, the relevant governing authority is the Conference. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provides no ability for the Conference to just "opt-in" for the purposes of non-Methodist premises. The Conference would have to "opt-in" to the Act in its totality.

The reply to the memorial is contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the Marriage and Relationships Task Group report.

M34 Arms exports

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 117; Voting 106 for, 0 against) welcomes the statement of the Conference of European Churches urging support for the European Parliament resolutions on arms export (17 December 2015) and the humanitarian situation in Yemen (25 February 2016) which includes an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia. We urge the Conference to endorse this statement, and:

- (a) direct the Secretary of the Conference to write to Her Majesty's Government calling for the cancellation of arms export contracts to the Middle East in line with the legally binding criteria of the EU Common Position 944/2008/CFSP;
- (b) authorise the Joint Public Issues Team to monitor the situation and make representations accordingly; and
- (c) encourage Local Churches to engage with this action and request the Connexion to provide resources to enable this.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod for drawing attention to this important matter. Since the start of the conflict in Yemen over 6,000 people have been killed, almost half of them civilians, and over 30,000 people have been injured. The Conference accepts this memorial and directs the Methodist Council to ensure that information about engagement on these issues and suggestions for action by Methodists be made available, with the agreement of our ecumenical partners, at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk.

M35 Support for refugees

The Sheffield (25/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 85; Voting: 83 for, 0 against) asks the Conference to give thanks for individuals and churches in Britain and Europe who are engaged with the plight of refugees from the Middle East and elsewhere. We give thanks, too, for Sheffield as the first City of Sanctuary, launched in 2005, and for all who work to support sanctuary in Sheffield and beyond. We regret however that to date, the response of the UK government has been limited to an arms-length approach. We ask the Conference to urge the government to an immediate review of the following key policies so that the UK may take its place alongside those countries doing so much more:

- (a) Widening the offer of access to refugees to include those who have been forced to flee their country using whatever means they can and including those already in Europe.
- (b) Accepting without delay those unaccompanied minors in Calais/Dunkirk who have family ties in the UK, and additionally taking a share of the wider group of unaccompanied children in Europe who are otherwise at risk of trafficking and crime in conjunction with the Home for Good initiative.
- (c) An immediate ending of the policy of revoking the right to remain for minors who attain the age of 18 years.

Finally, we call upon the government to engage with urgency in efforts to promote peace with justice in Syria and neighbouring countries.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sheffield Circuit Meeting for highlighting the continuing plight of refugees, which is both a human disaster and one of the biggest challenges currently faced by governments across Europe. It joins with the Circuit Meeting in giving thanks for all individuals and churches that are providing welcome and support to refugees and asylum seekers, including many churches throughout the Connexion and particularly notes the work done by St Andrew's Church, Malta. It also gives thanks for the work of our Methodist partners in various parts of Europe including the Mediterranean Hope project run by OPCEMI in Lampedusa, Italy.

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The Conference acclaims the work of Cities of Sanctuary, in Sheffield and elsewhere, and the efforts being made within the Birmingham District to enable the Methodist Church to pilot a 'sponsorship' scheme for refugees resettled in the UK. It affirms the coordinating work being done by groups such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees, along with the work of secular organisations including the National Refugee Welcome Board.

The Conference notes that the UK Government has pledged to resettle 20,000 refugees direct from countries bordering Syria and has been among the leading international donors supporting relief work in Jordan and Lebanon. It commends what has been achieved while also calling on the Government to do more. In particular, it urges the UK Government to fulfil its legal obligations by facilitating family reunion and allowing children and others into the UK if they have relatives here, and to respond with compassion to the plight of unaccompanied children stranded within the EU.

Campaigning on this issue, on behalf of the Methodist Church and our ecumenical partners, is being led by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT). Without seeking to prescribe the detailed priorities of that work, in a constantly changing international political context, the Conference directs the Methodist Council to ensure that JPIT continues to give high priority to campaigning on refugee and asylum issues with the aim of securing a much-improved humanitarian response from the UK Government and encouraging the international community to seek just and peaceful solutions.

M36 The Doncaster (25/14) Circuit Meeting (Present: 59; Voting: 55 for, 0 against)

This memorial was received with the same text as M35, with the exception of omitting the second sentence. The Conference adopts the same reply.

M37 Benefit sanctions

The Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 152; Voting: unanimous):

- (a) requests the Methodist Church of Great Britain to implore HM Government to take very seriously *The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom* and especially, to swiftly implement the six recommendations (58–63) on benefit sanctions (short term action);
- (b) invites the Conference to join the voice of the Church of England, and sister churches, by sending a letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions urging that there be a full and independent review of the benefit system and the use and implementation of sanctions (long term action);
- (c) asks that a copy of the letter also be sent to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod for its memorial. It recognises the important work being done in the District to challenge the unjust benefit sanctions regime, including the "Red Fridays campaign" highlighting the unnecessary hunger caused by benefit sanctions.

In March 2015 the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Church of Scotland, Church in Wales and Church Action on Poverty jointly published the report *Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions*. This report highlighted the problems caused by the sanctions system to the most vulnerable in our society, particularly those with mental health problems. A Welsh Data Supplement to the report was published in July 2015. The main recommendation of the *Rethink Sanctions* report was to call for a full independent inquiry into the sanctions regime. As part of the campaign, many Methodists wrote to their MPs calling for such an inquiry, and members of the Joint Public Issues Team raised these concerns directly with members of Parliament and the House of Lords.

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Drawing on evidence from the *Rethink Sanctions* report and the Church of England's extensive work on foodbanks including the *Feeding Britain* report, the General Synod of the Church of England has also called for a full independent inquiry into the sanctions system.

The Methodist Church, Baptist Union, United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland have recently written a private letter to the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions welcoming him to the role and highlighting issues such as sanctions where there are shared concerns, including calling again for a full independent inquiry into the sanctions regime.

The Conference therefore thanks the Newcastle upon Tyne District for this memorial, and:

- (a) commends the work of the Joint Public Issues Team in continuing to highlight the impact of changes to the benefits systems and challenging the negative portrayal in the media of those being sanctioned;
- (b) asks that a letter:
 - expressing the concerns of this Conference about the effects of sanctions;
 - repeating the request of the Methodist Church alongside many ecumenical partners for a full independent enquiry into benefit sanctions;
 - joining our Church of England sisters and brothers in asking that the DWP implement the recommendations of the All Parliamentary Report from March 2015 in relation to benefit sanctions

be handed into the Department of Work and Pensions Headquarters located a few yards from Westminster Central Hall before the Conference is adjourned.

- (c) directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Joint Public Issues Team seeks other opportunities for the Methodist Church to work with the Church of England and other sister churches in calling for change and raising the issues contained in the memorial with other members of the Government.

M38 Cadbury

The Birmingham District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 118; Voting: 57 for, 19 against) notes that Cadbury/Mondelez paid no corporation tax on profits of nearly £100 million in the financial year ending in 2014 and urges Methodists to boycott Cadbury chocolate until its parent company pays corporation tax commensurate with its sales and profits in the UK.

Reply

The Conference welcomes the memorial from the Birmingham District Synod and commends the work of the Methodist Tax Justice Network in highlighting tax practices which deprive the UK and other countries of tax revenue that is needed for health, education and other public services. The Conference therefore refers Methodists wishing to campaign on this issue to the information and suggestions at <http://methodisttaxjusticenetwork.nationbuilder.com/cadbury>.

M39 Centenary of the King's Hall Southall

The Ealing Trinity (35/24) Circuit Meeting (Present: 28; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the 2016 centenary of the King's Hall in Southall, now a part of the Ealing Trinity Circuit in the London District. Prominent on the High Street of this diverse west London community and adjacent to a

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new Crossrail station, the 1000 seat King's Hall church and site is now under redevelopment for Church and community use. The King's Hall is the home of our oldest Urdu/Hindi-speaking Methodist society, dating from 1958. Both the Urdu/Hindi- and English-speaking congregations of the King's Hall thank God for the witness of Methodism in this place. Ealing Trinity Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to give thanks for God's many blessings in this changing community during the first hundred years of Methodism in Southall, to pray for the work of Christ in Southall, and to recognise the continued mission based at the King's Hall.

Reply

The Conference thanks Ealing Trinity Circuit Meeting for this memorial and for drawing its attention to the centenary of the King's Hall. It joins with the congregations of the King's Hall in thanking God for the past century of Methodist witness in Southall and in particular for the church's pioneering work among Urdu/Hindi speakers. In sharing the Circuit Meeting's prayers for the future of mission in Southall, the Conference also encourages all those who are seeking to make innovative missional use of our connexional property in the spirit of "Releasing Property for God's Mission" and reminds Districts and Circuits of the opportunity also to apply for property grants in respect of suitable projects.