

52. Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life

Contact name and details	Deacon Karen McBride, Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order wardenmdo@methodistchurch.org.uk
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The 2019 Conference adopted the report prepared by the Faith and Order Committee concerning *The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order*. One of the recommendations of that report was that the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) review its Rule of Life. The work on this began following the 2019 Conference but it has taken longer than anticipated due to being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many years, the MDO has sought to work within a consensual and collaborative framework, where all 'voices' are encouraged and discerned. In revising the Rule it took inspiration from a number of collaborative styles, for example World Café and Holy Conversations. It has been the MDO's desire to anchor the Rule more explicitly within the Scriptures and to give clear expression to the commitments contained in the liturgy for the Ordination of Deacons. The MDO worked through its Area and Regional Group structures alongside the Convocation and members giving committing to times of individual prayer and reflection, much of this work being enabled by online gathering. In addition, the MDO has been aided by the prayerful accompaniment of many others, in particular we acknowledge and are grateful for the wise counsel of the Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt, Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee, Sister Rachel Overton, a modern day anchorite in the Anglican tradition, and Mr Bevan Powell, the Connexional EDI Adviser.

***RESOLUTIONS

52/1. The Conference received the Report.

52/2. The Conference approved the Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life as set out below, under the terms of SO 750(3), and directed that it be printed in the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* as Book IV Part 5 in place of the current text.

Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life

As a religious order we recognise the unconditional love of God as known in Jesus Christ. Out of this springs our calling to the sacrificial servant ministry of Christ and to be a dispersed community living by a rule of life.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit to live a life of:

Prayer • Witness • Service

We seek to do these things through God's grace and by following the pattern of Jesus Christ who lived among us. In humility he washed the feet of his disciples and calls us to follow his example.

The rule is life affirming and is a means by which we might be liberated to find a sense of wholeness in the rhythm of life. Our desire and hope are that freely followed and adapted to personal needs and circumstances, it will enrich our own life, the life of the Order, and the life of God's world.

May it be to us a blessing and a joy, and bring glory to God.

Living and Working with the Rule

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Proverbs 3: 5

As a religious order we recognise the unconditional love of God as known in Jesus Christ. Out of this springs our calling to the sacrificial servant ministry of Christ and to be a dispersed community living by a rule of life.

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit to live a life of:

• Prayer • Witness • Service

We seek to do these things through God's grace and by following the pattern of Jesus Christ who lived among us. In humility he washed the feet of his disciples and calls us to follow his example.

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

Unless I wash you, you can have no share with me...I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. John 13: 1 - 20

The Order provides the means for: fellowship and encouragement, pastoral care and mutual support, prayer and discipline, a gracious space to grow and opportunities to explore, celebrate and share in God's purpose and plan.

As members of the Order, we have a communal sense of identity and belonging, a collective responsibility, a mutual accountability, a shared life of prayer, a common calling, and a lifelong commitment. We recognise God's image in all that God has made. We welcome and celebrate the gifts and talents of all. Through our diversity we gain a greater insight into the Kingdom of God.

This Rule provides a framework to enable us to live out our vocation as those who are committed to the Life of Prayer, prophetic Witness and Service.

We desire to live by the Rule, yet we acknowledge our human frailty and the imperfection of our lives and know that at times we will fall short. However, we trust in the transforming grace and loving mercy of God, the wisdom of the Rule, the encouragement and upholding of one another in prayer.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Romans 8: 26

As part of our response to the love of God we follow this rule of life to deepen our fellowship and bind us together as a dispersed community. This enables us to continue to become the people God wants us to be, both individually and as an Order, and with all the people of God proclaim the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ and serve in the Church and in the World.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

The rule is life-affirming and is a means by which we might be liberated to find a sense of wholeness in the rhythm of life. Our desire and hope are that freely followed and adapted to

personal needs and circumstances, it will enrich our own life, the life of the Order, and the life of God's world.

For God so loved the world John 3: 16a

May it be to us a blessing and a joy, and bring glory to God.

With God's help we endeavour to:

Prayer, Lectio and Worship

Pray without ceasing

- attend worship regularly, including Holy Communion
- set aside time to read the Bible devotionally
- set aside time for prayer and reflection, including a time of intercession for the world, the church, the Order and our own needs and concerns.
- set aside time for self-examination and reflection
- find and commit to meeting regularly with a spiritual director/ companion, who will accompany, help, challenge, and affirm us

Witness and Service

Remember your call.

Support the weak, bind up the broken,

gather in the outcast, welcome the stranger, seek the lost.

So minister care that you make glad those whom you help in their need. Let the concerns and sorrows of others be as your own

- intentionally nurture, encourage and build community wherever we are.
- discern and relate to the needs of the community in which we live and work and those we minister to and alongside.
- serve faithfully with patience and understanding
- minister Christ's love and compassion
- proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ through our words and actions
- promote justice and challenge inequality through prayer and action
- help those we serve to offer their lives to God.

Balance

This ministry will make great demands upon you and upon those close to you, yet in all this, the Holy Spirit will sustain you by grace.

- order the rhythm of our lives according to personal circumstances, which will differ from person to person
- be attentive to our own wellbeing, recognise when we need help and accept support and encouragement from others
- Make time for regular times of rest and relaxation, appropriate time off, holiday, quarter days, retreats/quiet days, sabbaticals and those things which resource us, including study and learning, hobbies and interests
- be sensitive to the needs of those closest to us; our families, dependents, and friends

Mutual Accountability

You are to share fully in the life of your Order and to keep its discipline.

- attend Convocation (unless a dispensation is granted)
- attend the Service of rededication or, if unable to attend, find another appropriate way to do so
- adapt the rule to our own needs and experiences and review annually
- offer a lifetime of service which typically includes the discipline of itinerancy and direct stationing.
- participate as fully as possible in the life of Area Groups
- offer pastoral care and hospitality to one another
- bear with each other and call one another on to growth, wholeness and holiness
- be willing to be open and truthful, offer wise counsel, and share in one another's joys and sorrows.

Stewardship

Fulfil your calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. In all things, give counsel and encouragement to all whom Christ entrusts to your care. Let no one suffer hurt through your neglect.

- Acknowledge, enjoy, and share God's gifts to us of time, talents, money and possessions and, through God's grace, be able stewards of these
- Live as conscientious stewards of the planet
- Care for what and who is vulnerable and fragile
- Model our living on the pattern and example of Jesus Christ

May Christ your master, when he comes in glory, count you among his faithful servants. To God be the glory forever.