

Contact name and details	Deacon Karen McBride, Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order mdowarden@methodistchurch.org.uk
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1. Our life together as deacons and members of the Order

Membership:

At the time of writing, the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) has a complement of 259 members.

134 in the active work (including seven diaconal probationers and four diaconal ordinands);

110 supernumerary deacons;

13 diaconal students.

Two deacons hold 'without appointment' status.

In addition there are:

One authorised deacon and one associate deacon in the active work;

One supernumerary associate deacon;

19 'Associate members' and a number of 'Friends' who commit to support the Order through prayer and advocacy.

Since the MDO report to the Conference 2020:

- Six full members and one MDO Associate member have died;
- Four diaconal probationers have been received into Full Connexion and full membership of the Order, and we look forward to their ordination to the diaconate within the universal Church;
- Three diaconal probationers will be recommended to the Conference 2021 for reception into Full Connexion, full membership of the MDO and ordination to the diaconate within the universal Church;
- Four people were accepted as candidates for training and two further candidates will be recommended to the Conference 2021;
- Five members are seeking permission to 'sit down'.

2. Convocation, Area Group Life, and the reviewing of the MDO Rule of Life

Convocation 2020 was held via the medium of Zoom and, from necessity, we had to lay to one side much of the normal pattern and business. The Convocation continued to be a time of corporate prayer and fellowship and we were inspired, encouraged, comforted, and provoked by a pattern of 'Retreats in Daily Life' led by the Revd Dr

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Jonathan Dean, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler and Sister Rachel Overton (a modern-day Anchorite based in Peterborough).

Our hopes of an additional face to face Convocation in October 2020 was also unable to happen. Once again Zoom enabled a 3-day 'Regional Group' style Convocation to take place and we were able to re-engage together in the postponed work directed to us by the 2019 Conference of reviewing the MDO Rule of life work. This work was continued over the months that followed and, through the prayer, reflections, and the committed engagement of the MDO Area Groups and individual members, we were able to bring a working draft to the 2021 Convocation which was further developed and shaped into a working draft that members will now seek to put into practice before final adjustments are made for presentation to the Methodist Council and the Conference in 2022.

The MDO has also appraised its Area Group life and produced a guiding framework for members and is currently preparing in the light of the Report of 2019 a revision of its booklet 'A deacon in the Circuit' which will be available from summer 2021.

Convocation 2021 was a 'blended' event where a small number of guests, including the President and Vice- President of the Conference, partners, and members of the MDO facilitated Convocation from a conference venue, with others joining via Zoom and YouTube. Our theme took inspiration from the Methodist Church and our own Rule: **'Although diverse- for the sake of the Kingdom of God: a growing, inclusive, evangelistic, justice-seeking MDO.'** Several guests from the around the Connexion, along with deacons, facilitated us to think and reflect on how we practice and live this out within daily life and our life together in the Order. The poet and theologian Padraig O' Tuama's exploration of the book of Ruth offered new insights into what it means to belong and challenged the borders we make; later he encouraged us, through prayer and poetry, to deepen our relationship with God.

3. Our life and ministry within God's Church

In common with the disciples of Christ everywhere, members have continued to seek to serve God and God's world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like others we too have found ourselves to be hard pressed and challenged at times; yet with God's help and grace we have been able to recognise the opportunities and privileges in which we are continually being invited to response with a ministry of witness and service.

Members continue to commit to the life of prayer, sometimes *virtually* together or alone, upholding before God, the world, the Church, and each other; and through the MDO Examen to review their response to God's grace and mercy.

The 2019 Conference Report on the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order:

Alongside the reviewing of the MDO Rule and the MDO Mission Statement, the MDO is working with others to embed the theology and ecclesiology of the diaconate and the MDO into the life of whole Church. This includes work with the Ministries Committee around deacons and the ministry of preaching and exploring changes needed to the candidating, training and probation processes, as well as working with the Methodist Council and the Faith and Order Committee to address those areas identified as requiring further exploration. These include questions around oversight, ecumenical relationships, the office of the Vice-President, the review of the category of 'Associate Member', and reflections of diaconal dress.

4. Our relationship with other diaconal orders and deacons

Sadly, due to COVID-19 and its necessary restrictions we have not been able to share hospitality and fellowship in ways we have become accustomed to doing. However, two members of MDO have participated virtually in the Church of Scotland Diaconate councils; we have prayed for and celebrated with Roman Catholic deacons on the 50th anniversary of the restitution of the Permanent Diaconate, remained in fellowship with Methodist Church of Southern Africa Order of Deacons, attended lectures and conversations across a number of World Diakonia regions alongside our membership within the Diakonia Africa- Europe region, and gladly welcomed (albeit virtually) a number of ecumenical guests to Convocation 2021.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

58/1. The Conference receives the Report.

58/2. The Conference resolves that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire from Tuesday 3 May until Friday 6 May 2022.