

# 9. Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

## 1. Celebrating 60 Years

In 2008 the Society celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

It all began with the gift of a manor house in Barrow-on-Trent in Derbyshire. To begin with retired ministers moved into the house and then, in 1950, the then President of the Conference, The Revd W E Sangster, opened the newly finished premises, which had been built in the grounds.

By 1953 the Association (as it was called then) owned 60 dwellings, by 1969 this had increased to 200, in 1973 there were 333, in 1989 an increase to 700 and today the Society owns more than 950 properties.

In the early days properties were built on sites provided by churches or members gave or bequeathed houses. The problem was that they were often not where ministers wanted to retire but no alternatives were available. A further complication was that some ministers found that because they were living next to the church, they were sometimes expected almost to act as caretakers and/or an unpaid Active Supernumerary. By the mid seventies it became established policy to give ministers a fairly good choice of properties and areas, often buying specially in each case.

From the beginning widows had always been assured of continuity of tenure and in the 1970s the Society introduced a scheme, which provided housing for widows of ministers who died in the active work. Other changes included the welcoming of women ministers and the housing of widowers and the provision of accommodation for Deaconesses and lay missionaries.

Ministers who could afford to house themselves were expected to do so and our charitable status depended (and still does) on us accommodating only those who were in need. In the early 1980s the Equity Sharing Scheme was introduced with the rules varying over the years according to the fortunes of the Society and the general price of houses in the country.

More recent changes have included the introduction of a transfer policy which enables tenants to move to a more suitable property when they need to, a planned maintenance programme to ensure properties are brought up to the Decent Homes standard and a visit programme to provide a channel of communication between staff and tenants for matters not just relating to the property but general well being.

We hope everyone will join us in our celebrations. Worship material together with information about the Society's work today is being published and distributed. It is essential that more people know about the services which are provided as there is clearly an on-going need. Changes in legislation require regular reviews of policies and procedures to ensure required standards are met in relation to property maintenance, landlord responsibilities, financial reporting and, most recently, conveyancing. Longer life expectancy and the wish to continue

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living at home for as long as possible require the provision of aids and adaptations and the opportunity to move to more suitable accommodation.

### **2. Figures for 2007**

As at August 2007 there were 918 ministerial tenants in Society, Auxiliary Fund and Management Trustee properties.

In the year under review 79 ministers and 4 deacons were permitted by the Conference to become supernumeraries. Of these 32 were accepted by the Society to be housed. In addition 3 ministers retiring on health grounds and 2 with special circumstances were provided with accommodation. 11 tenants transferred to properties more suitable for their requirements.

During the year 12 existing Society properties were refurbished and allocated to new and transferring ministerial applicants. 35 properties were purchased and 34 properties that had become surplus to requirements were sold.

The Society's charitable rules state that we house retired ministers, deacons and their widow(er)s upon terms appropriate to their means. Applicants with less than £50,000 are not expected to contribute towards the cost of their home whilst those with in excess of this amount are expected to contribute through our shared equity scheme – 30 applicants made equity contributions in 2005/06. Ministers with over £200,000 are expected to provide their own housing. The maximum contribution of the Society towards a property in 2006/7 was £165,000. In the financial year 2007/8 the Society's maximum contribution will be £168,000.

### **3. Reply to Notice of Motion No. 142 (2007): Methodist Ministers Housing Society Equity Share Scheme.**

In 2007 the following Notice of Motion was referred, by the Conference, to the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

'Under the present rules of MMHS there is a limit on property value of £165,000. Shared equity is allowed up to 70%, but only within this figure, thus on the maximum 70% equity the minister would contribute £112,500 and MMHS £52,500.

This £165,000 limit makes it almost impossible (save the death of a Supernumerary in an existing property) to live near family and friendship networks in London and the South East.

Conference therefore asks MMHS to explore the allowing the purchase of property in which up to the maximum of 70% equity is in addition to the £165,000: ie  $£165,000 + (70\% \text{ of } £165,000 = £112,500) = £280,500$ '.

The Society's board has carefully considered the motion.

It wishes to make clear that shared equity is not allowed only within the figure of £165,000. Ministers regularly contribute an additional sum towards the purchase

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of a property on the market for more than the annual figure set by the Society. All contributions made by the minister are converted into an equity share.

In considering their response the Board considered a detailed comparison which has been made with a similar scheme – the difference between the two being that the other provides for regional variations in the level of contribution made. It also consulted with the proposer of the Notice of Motion and with other interested parties.

The board acknowledges the difficulties experienced by ministers who wish to retire to areas where property prices are significantly higher than the Society's maximum amount. It continues to endorse the practice whereby existing properties which are suitable as retirement homes and become available in these areas are refurbished and let on a commercial basis for sufficient time to ascertain whether or not they are required by ministerial tenants. This has been the policy of the Society for a number of years with an average of 8 properties each year being refurbished at an annual cost of approximately £1 million.

The board unanimously agreed that the Society should continue with the policy of one maximum figure for the whole of the UK on the basis that this benefits the greater number of ministers.

The Board commends this response to the Conference.

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

**9/1.** The Conference receives the Report.

**9/2.** The Conference receives the response to Notice of Motion 142.