

## **62. District Resolutions**

### **FAIRLY TRADED AND LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD**

The York and Hull District Synod (Present: 158. Vote: F:158 A:0) requests the Methodist Conference of 2008 to discuss the matter of fairly traded and locally produced food.

The Synod's concern builds upon the position adopted by the Conference in 2007 (Agenda Item 73; Daily Record 6/19) which was in turn based on a resolution from the Cumbria District. In that resolution there was an acknowledgement of the support Christians give to Fair Trade products and a calling for a commitment to fair trade for UK producers as well. The Conference called for "Christians prayerfully to consider the way in which their own purchasing and consumption patterns and expectations contribute to unfairness and injustice in the domestic market."

The York and Hull District Synod believes that the Methodist Conference should itself model good practice in this area in order to support and encourage individual Christians in doing the same. As a Conference, £25-30K is spent on food and we have a duty to see that money benefits both the local economy and producers in developing countries.

The Fair Trade movement began largely in churches and by 2007 £493million of goods were sold. This has had a huge impact on the lives of producers. A similar move within the Church over the use of locally produced food could also begin to have an impact on the rural communities around Conference venues.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**62/1** The Conference directs those responsible for making arrangements for the Conference to prioritise the use of fairly traded and locally produced food when considering conference venues; and actively encourages Districts to adopt the same concern in their Circuits and churches when arranging residential and similar events.

### **CLOSER WORKING BETWEEN THE METHODIST CHURCH AND THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod (Present: 153. Vote: F:153 A:0) requests the Methodist Conference of 2008 to discuss the matter of closer working between the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. Its concern has arisen out of its own contact with the West Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church, and is aware of a parallel resolution being presented by that Synod to the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.

It is some years since consideration was given to Methodist/United Reformed Church relationships. During that time there has been much experience gained in working together. Since this was last looked at the Methodist Church has entered into a covenant with the Church of England, which is facilitating ecumenical progress.

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This resolution seeks to complement that initiative. We look to the Conference and General Assembly to guide us whether there is a desire in the Methodist and United Reformed Churches to explore how we might work closer together. If the Conference and General Assembly are so minded we are suggesting the setting up of a group to bring further proposals to both the Conference and the General Assembly, at a time appropriate to the group. This is not a proposal to move to organic union, unless this emerged as the direction in which the Spirit is leading. It is a proposal to explore further joint working for the sake of shared mission.

Issues that might be considered by the group are:

- Since church governance is very different in our two churches can we create a structure that minimises ecumenical meetings but facilitates diversity? This might be less than full union but closer than we are now. Areas that would need addressing include the Connexional nature of the Methodist Church together with the role of Circuits, alongside the United Reformed Church emphasis on the role of Elders and Church meetings
- In view of United Reformed Church structures changing with Synods playing the main intermediate role between the Assembly and the local church, and Circuits being enlarged within the Methodist Church, together with the changing role of the District, is there a possibility of a joint structure at District/Synod level?
- Is there value in a joint governing conference? E.g. a joint meeting between Methodist Conference and United Reformed Church General Assembly, with some sessions overlapping and some held separately
- Can resources be used more effectively together enabling us to put more resources into mission and outreach? E.g. in the areas of training, finance, ministerial deployment & lay leadership
- What effect would any such moves have on other ecumenical relations? We want to see this as adding another strand to effective ecumenical working rather than competing with existing work.

This is not intended as an exhaustive list, rather examples of what might be worth looking at.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

- 62/2.** The Conference notes the large number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and increasing numbers of ecumenical areas where Methodists and members of the United Reformed Church work closely together, the success of the Joint Public Issues Team, the similarity of worship patterns, and the shared understanding of church life in many local Methodist and United Reformed churches; and directs the Methodist Council to engage in further conversations with the relevant bodies of the United Reformed Church as to how we can work more closely together, using more efficiently the resources of the two Churches to increase our effectiveness in mission and outreach and to respond in obedience to Jesus' prayer that we may be one that the world may believe.

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### **ENCOURAGING MINISTERIAL VOCATIONS**

The London District Synod requests the Methodist Conference of 2008 to discuss the matter of encouraging ministerial vocations. (Resolution 62/3: Present 208. F:200 A:3 Resolution 62/4: Present 208. F:201 A:7)

The Synod believes that the Methodist Church faces a grave crisis in the number of candidates offering for ordained ministry, and for presbyteral ministry in particular. The figures to be found elsewhere in the Conference Agenda in the *Statistics for Mission* report (Section 55) and the report of the Stationing Committee (Section 28) demonstrate that there is an uneven level of decline within different constituent parts of British Methodism. In particular there is

- a) a steady drop in membership;
- b) a slower reduction in worship centres; and
- c) a faster reduction in the number of presbyters in active service.

The projections in the Stationing Committee report suggest that at the start of connexional year 2008/9 there will be 1876 presbyters in the active work; at the start of 2009/10, 1841; 2010-11, 1811; 2011-12, 1750; and 2012-13, 1675. That represents a loss of 201 over a 4 year period.

Those projections are based on an estimate that there will be 50 new probationer presbyters stationed in each year quoted above.

The projections are also based on an estimate (based on the age of presbyters and their length of service) that there will be a large increase in the number of presbyters becoming supernumerary at the end of 2010-11 and 2011-12. It is recognised that the advent of flexible retirement may affect these estimates, and that although this might increase the number of those becoming supernumerary it could also have the effect of allowing presbyters to serve in part-time capacities beyond the age when they would otherwise become supernumerary. Nevertheless, the general trend is clear.

The London District Synod is concerned that the current approach to the processes involved in stationing seems to reflect a "one size fits all" attitude that undermines the rhetoric that is often expressed about valuing a diversity of gifts in ministerial vocation. It is also concerned about the effects of the decline in the number of presbyters on existing presbyters in terms of morale and levels of stress.

The Synod also believes that the reduction in the number of presbyters outlined above should be treated as a description of what will happen unless a new strategy is adopted, not as an acceptable target - and that urgent steps should be taken to improve the situation. The Methodist people have shown that they are willing to pay for ministry out of revenue budgets. Other resources which might be used for this purpose are also increasingly being unlocked.

In particular, the Synod believes that the estimate of 50 new probationers each year should not come to be thought of as a target number, and that steps should be taken to increase the numbers of those enabled to discover and fulfil a vocation to ordained ministry. The Synod is concerned that in the current selection processes for candidates for both presbyteral and diaconal ministry there is an emphasis on broad life experience that favours older candidates and results in experience triumphing over potential.

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It is also concerned that at present there is currently only one route for those seeking to be accepted for training as presbyters, in that they first have to become accredited as local preachers and then offer as candidates. This increases the length of time it takes for a young person to move through the procedures.

The Synod would like to see steps taken that will make candidating for ordained ministry in Methodism an attractive option for young people who are thinking about how to use their lives. Such steps might include allowing younger candidates to come forward without necessarily being local preachers. They would then follow a model of having theological training including training to preach (which is not at present a strong training emphasis) and then be sent to work for three years alongside a “Training Presbyter” in a suitably identified circuit before being stationed in their own right. Targeted funding could be released – from a range of connexional and circuit sources – with the specific purpose of training these younger presbyters.

Money from the designated Training Fund could be used to support action to increase the numbers of both younger and older people who are enabled to fulfil a vocation to ordained ministry. This could include a series of ‘District Roadshows’ run by the Connexion with the specific purpose of setting out the challenge of presbyteral and diaconal ministry and showing what great callings they are. The aim should be to increase the expected number of new probationers from 50 a year to 75 a year over a five year period.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

- 62/3.** The Conference determines to seek actively to encourage an increasing number of presbyters and deacons to serve in the active work with a view to increasing the projected number of new probationers each year from 50 to 75 over a five year period, and authorises the Methodist Council to oversee the implementation of this policy.
- 62/4.** The Conference directs the Methodist Council to develop proposals for a new and creative strategy for recruiting candidates under 30 years of age through the creation of diverse candidating requirements, diverse training patterns and an initial three year station in a designated “Training Circuit”.