

## 12. Methodist Diaconal Order General Report

1. The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO), along with the rest of the Methodist Church, has experienced significant upheaval and change over the past 12 months as it embraces a new style of leadership. As part of the *Team Focus* initiative, the MDO found itself in the position of having to reduce staffing to one and a half full-time equivalent posts and, as a result, having to make hard decisions about the workload that was carried by the Warden and the Associate Warden. After consultations with the membership of the Order, a more radical model was introduced in which the Warden became the first among equals of a team of six initially, but which will reduce to five in the new Connexional year, each carrying responsibility for a particular aspect of the work of the Order – pastoral care, vocations, communication, resources and development of the Centre. This has been very successful and much appreciated by the members of the Order and work continues to refine and further develop the model.
2. October brought an invitation to members of the MDO to take part in the unveiling of a 'blue plaque' commemorating the contribution that the Wesley Deaconess College at Ilkley had made to the fabric of the civic life at Ilkley. Around 30 deacons – some of whom had been trained at Ilkley - and friends joined the Ilkley Civic Society to mark this event which was well reported in the local press.
3. As a result of a steady increase in numbers offering for ministry in Ireland, for which we offer praise and thanks to God, the MDO is exploring in partnership with the Irish Conference the possibility of stationing one or two deacons into that Conference. Further support could be offered by the Order, particularly around training. Two deacons have expressed an interest in this exciting and innovative venture and talks are continuing with a view to stationing, potentially in 2011.
4. A number of 'conversations' are taking place within the Order, including the contribution of the Order to the senior leadership within the Methodist Church, and (in response to the 'Re-floating the Titanic' debate at last year's Conference) the unique contribution that the Order can make to the Church's response to today's rapidly changing society. This will result in a major consultation programme within the Order taking place regionally, the results of which will be presented to the Methodist Council in 2010. The Order is undertaking its own '*Mapping a Way Forward*' exercise and plans for the future use of the MDO Centre in Birmingham are also being explored.
5. Conversations taking place with the wider Church family include renewed energy being put into discussions with the Faith and Order Committee and the Church of England's Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG) on the nature of a permanent diaconate. This is at the request of the Joint

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Implementation Commission of the Covenant between the Methodist Church and the Church of England. The Order welcomes this opportunity to share our theology and ethos.

6. Under the banner of the report to Conference of the Stationing Review Group, the Order has committed itself to finding ways of more closely aligning the processes of candidating, stationing and probationer oversight with that of presbyters, whilst at the same time maintaining those unique characteristics that make the Order distinctive - for example, a common commitment to the discipline of itinerancy, direct stationing and the discernment of call to be a member of a religious order.

**6.1** For the first time, the selection processes of both orders of ministry were held together this year and work is being undertaken to alter Standing Orders to enable Diaconal Candidates Selection Committee and Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee to meet as one larger body.

**6.2** Changes to the dates for the stationing of deacons will enable recommendations of the Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee (DSSC) to be shared much earlier during the matching process for presbyters, thus enabling a more flexible approach to the stationing of deacons, and in particular allowing the DSSC to be more responsive to the mission priorities of Circuits and Districts. The Order would also welcome the opportunity to explore ways of stationing deacons where the need is

greatest rather than where funding is available although it is acknowledged that these two things are not necessarily incompatible.

**6.3** The MDO rejoices that Circuits are becoming increasingly more creative in their thinking and as a result, opening up more new appointments. We would want to encourage Circuits to continue to consider the benefits of opening up new diaconal appointments or continuing or reconfiguring existing diaconal appointments and would respond positively to requests from Circuits for support in developing or reconfiguring appointments.

**6.4** In terms of candidates for the Order, we are experiencing a rise in the number of enquiries and the *Exploration of Vocation* events the Order offers regularly at the Centre are consistently oversubscribed. As a practical response, the Order will be organising extra *Exploration of Vocation* events but would also respond positively to invitations from Districts or regional groupings wishing to host an event of this nature.

**6.5** There is some concern expressed within the Order that there are no candidates from black and other ethnic minority groupings in the Church offering for ordained diaconal ministry. The Order is committed to enabling and encouraging diaconal ministry throughout the Church and wishes to explore this issue further and will be actively engaging with appropriate groups and individuals to discern possible reasons for this, and what might be done as a result.

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- 6.6** The Order is preparing a resource pack which will be made available via the Order's website for those taking part in *Exploring Vocation, Extending Discipleship* courses. This should be available in the autumn.
- 7.** The World Diakonia Conference is being hosted by *Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean*, and is being held in Atlanta, Georgia in July 2009. The Conference takes as its name *Crossroads of grace...revive and reconcile* and the MDO are pleased to report that we are able to send six representatives, including one student deacon, to that Conference largely due to generous giving within the membership of the Order. The overall Biblical text running throughout the conference is taken from Zechariah 8:1-8. The MDO remains committed to being an active member of Diakonia World Federation and one of our members has been nominated as World President, the elections for which take place during the conference itself.
- 8.** This Conference sees the last Diaconal Session of Conference being held. The work of this session will now take place at a Conference Diaconal Committee which will normally meet within the context of Convocation. As a result of this, the date of Convocation has had to change in order that recommendations made by the Diaconal Candidates Selection Committee may be accepted by the Conference Diaconal Committee before being sent to the Representative Session of the Conference. The annual Convocation of the MDO will now take place each May and has been extended to accommodate the open meeting of the Committee and also the need for a closed session of the Committee where this becomes necessary.
- 9.** Finally, the MDO continues to grow, particularly its active membership. Overall membership currently stands at 248 made up from 104 ordained deacons in active work, 17 probationer deacons, 12 student deacons, 5 ordinands and 110 supernumeraries. In addition 8 candidates have been recommended to the Conference for pre-ordination training this year and 1 transfer of an ordained deacon from another Conference to be received on probation before being received into full connexion at a future date.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 12/1.** The Conference adopted the Report.
- 12/2.** The Conference resolved that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at The Hayes Conference Centre from Monday 10 to Thursday 13 May 2010.