

1. The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) put in place last year a leadership team to enable and support the internal workings of the Order and also to support the Warden. This has proved to be a very successful model of working and continues to be appreciated by members of the Order. Work has been done to develop the model further and it has been possible to devolve responsibility for various areas of the life of the Order to a number of individuals. The leadership team remains committed to the continued development of wholly collaborative styles of working where ever possible. At the time of writing this report, the Order is being consulted about enlarging the Team further by the introduction of another member who could take responsibility for the coordination of matters pertaining to the stationing of deacons.
2. Work continues to develop the MDO Centre in Birmingham as a pastoral centre for the Order. During consultations with the Order at the annual Convocation, members felt that the Centre was essential to the identity of the Order and that it should be regarded as the heart of the Order as a dispersed community. It was vital therefore, to find ways of making the Centre viable and to that end a part-time diaconal appointment was created and funded from within the Order's existing budget to develop the building as a pastoral centre. The post created was combined with the existing role of the Pastoral Care Coordinator as it was felt that there was a degree of synergy between both roles that would reinforce the development of the Centre as a place of care, hospitality and prayerful presence, and would root the day-to-day pastoral care of members of the Order into a physical space. There is still much to be done to develop a clear financial plan for the long-term sustainability of the Centre but there are very encouraging signs as higher levels of income have been generated from the use of the Centre by members of the Order, the wider Methodist Church and other guests. The Order is nevertheless dependent on grant funding from the connexional budget to break even and this funding is being reduced. The Order has been seeking for the past year to establish a designated fund which would allow surplus donations to accumulate year by year which would provide a much needed reserve in order that the high quality standard of provision and facilities at the Centre can be maintained.
3. Members of the Order, through the work of the Resources Coordinator have been able to get a clearer appreciation of the budgets and funds under its control. Changes have been made and the Order has responded appropriately to pressures on its budgets and maintained a tight control of its discretionary spending. It is clear to the Leadership Team that a thorough review of the MDO investment and accumulated funds is needed, including the way they are managed and what they are used for. Such a review is necessary so that the Order and the wider church can be assured that good practice in the management of funds, reserves policies and other charity law requirements are being met. Following through the implications of an improved understanding in the Church of the status of deacons as an order of ministry alongside the order of presbyters, deacons are now able to access financial assistance from funds which were previously only available to presbyters. This raises questions around parity of treatment and careful analysis is needed here in consultation with the Connexional Allowances Committee about the use of funds which are currently only available to deacons. However, it is noted that the general economic climate has reduced the investment income of these funds and as a result, there has been a reduction in the amount available for grants and gifts.
4. The continuing rise in numbers of enquiries and candidates for the Order is a blessing to the Church, but also brings certain practical and structural dilemmas which the Order must face. For example, how do we manage this growth and where do we find the extra resources that growing numbers demand? Last year, around 180 members of the Order gathered for the annual Convocation. This year, the number is 224. The Order this year had 18 candidates offer themselves, from which 15 offers were accepted which amounted to over a third of the total number of candidates for ordained ministry. The current membership of the Order stands at 264 of which 117 are in active circuit ministry, 26 are student deacons in training, 6 are without appointment and 115 are supernumerary. In the General Report to the

Conference last year, the Order expressed some concern that there were no black and other ethnic minority candidates offering for the Order and expressed its ongoing commitment to the enabling and encouraging of diaconal ministry throughout the church. Efforts were made to promote the Order in a variety of ways which might encourage minority groups to respond fully to the call of God upon their lives, which may include offering as candidates for the Order. The Order is pleased to inform the Conference that six black candidates were recommended for training by the Diaconal Candidates' Selection Committee this year.

5. This year saw one of the most complex and dynamic stationing years the Order has experienced in a long time. Amongst those to be stationed were five presbyteral/diaconal couples and seven probationers, one of whom was married to a probationer presbyter. A range of vocational and pastoral issues affected the processes of stationing and, unusually, two deacons resisted the appointments into which they had been stationed and a third withdrew after the match had been agreed. The Warden asked the Stationing Committee if a small group could be convened to look at a range of pressure points affecting stationing which ranged from diaconal/presbyteral couples (including those in civil partnerships) in stationing; the length of appointments, particularly in relation to re-invitations for first and subsequent appointment; the status of being without appointment and, direct stationing. A group consisting of The Revd Peter Barber (Chair of DSSC), Deacon Sue Culver (Warden), Deacon Myrtle Poxon, Mrs Margaret Havers, Dr Malcolm Stevenson and the Revd Dr Howard Mellor (Discernment and Selection Coordinator in the Connexional Team) were asked to meet and bring a short report to the Stationing Committee. The group recommended that the Convocation be invited to reaffirm the traditional principles governing diaconal stationing (principles of direct stationing and commitment to itinerancy) and that the Stationing Committee consider further how the issues of civil partnerships, the overall length of appointments (including re-invitations), the status of being without appointment, ministerial competency and more robust candidating and discontinuance processes might be addressed by the wider Church.

A discussion about the traditional principles governing diaconal stationing is being held at Convocation this year.

6. The Order has recently taken part in consultations with the Church of England about the diaconate. These were fruitful, engaging, honest conversations which revealed the many similarities and differences between the understandings of both denominations about the diaconate. Some careful analysis of these conversations is being undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee alongside the Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England and will be presented to the Joint Implementation Commission for the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Britain.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 44/1. The Conference adopted the Report**
- 44/2. The Conference resolved that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at The Hayes Conference Centre from Monday 16th to Thursday 19th May 2011**