A look back at the Conference

The 2015 Conference met at the Southport Theatre and Convention Centre. This document provides an overview of some of the decisions of the Conference. For the full details, please see the Minutes of the Conference and www.methodist.org.uk/conference

The President and Vice-President of the Conference

The Revd Steve Wild was inducted as President and Dr Jill Barber as the Vice-President of the Conference.

The President of the Conference challenged the Church to bring one new person to faith at every chapel or congregation across the Connexion. He said “Let’s take God seriously. I want to help us in the task of evangelism, to put mission on the agenda and give our churches an aim to win a person for Christ.” He reminded the Conference that wherever our mission takes us, God has gone there before us.

In her inaugural address, Dr Jill Barber spoke of the “four Ps” of Methodism: Prophesy, Pray, Passion and Protest. “Have we lost that passion for living out the gospel through social and political action?” she asked. “Is there a danger that we have privatised our faith, so that it makes us feel better as individuals, but we fail to relate it to wider community and global issues? I want to call on Methodists to get involved in local and national politics. To become a voice for change, challenging the politics of self-interest and upholding the politics of the common good.”

The Conference received into Full Connexion 49 new presbyters, as well as another 5 by transfer or reinstatement. The Conference also received into Full Connexion nine deacons. On the afternoon and evening of 28 June, seven Ordination Services were held at venues including Blackburn, Chester, Liverpool and Southport.

The Conference recommended 23 people to proceed to ministerial training.

Courage Cost and Hope: The Report on the Past Cases Review

The Past Cases Review is a hugely significant piece of work. The report was published earlier this year, and the focus at the Conference was on the implementation of its 23 recommendations. The Conference
appointed the Revd Gwyneth Owen as chair of the body charged with ensuring that the recommendations are implemented across the whole Connexion.

The implementation group will report to the Conferences of 2016 and 2017. The review itself recommends that a draft supervision policy should come to the Council in October 2015 and that a training course be developed by December and piloted throughout 2016. The final version of the course should roll out across the Connexion from January 2017.

The Revd Dr Martyn Atkins repeated the “full and unreserved” apology the Church made when the report was published. “It is essential that we recognise the failings of the past,” he said. “However, without a commitment to change and the willingness to take the hard steps to achieve that change, we know that an apology alone could never be enough. This is the challenge that lies before the Church today and will be a continuing challenge for us for many years to come.”

**Ethical investment**

The report from the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI), along with related Notice of Motion (see below), looked at a variety of issues. But the two of highest profile related to investment in Nestlé and in fossil fuels. The Conference received the JACEI report and a separate report into Nestlé and Breast Milk Substitutes Marketing.

The Conference received a report on Fossil Fuels and Ethical Investment and the replies to several memorials on the subject encouraged the Methodist people to study the report and the Central Finance Board’s policy and position papers on this subject.

**Positive Working Together**

The Conference received Positive Working Together, a major piece of work looking at bullying and harassment. The report requires districts to appoint someone to provide information for those experiencing bullying or harassment issues, and that training and support be provided to district reconciliation groups.

The report also directed that the Guidelines agreed by the Council should be promoted.

**Reaffirmation of Baptism with Water**

The Faith and Order Committee produced an Order for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith Including the Use of Water. This is not a service of Baptism and care must be taken to ensure this principle is not compromised.

**The budget and accounts**

The Conference approved both the Connexional Central Services Budget and the Unified Statement of Connexional Finances. It also agreed the District Allocations for 2015/16, a 2% rise in line with the plan agreed for the three years to 2016/17.

The total planned income for 2016/17 is £29.1 million, down from the £30.4 million budgeted for 2014/15. Total expenditure will rise to £36.3 million in 2015/16 from the budgeted £33.6 million this year. The increase in net expenditure is in line with the agreed
reserves policy, and is budgeted to fall in subsequent years.

The General Secretary’s Report
In his last report to the Conference as General Secretary, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins spoke of the privilege he has felt in his time in this office. He told the Conference how the work of the Revd Dr Robert Schnase of the United Methodist Church has been valuable in helping the Connexional Leaders’ Forum to focus on “two key themes: the accountability and flourishing of our ministers, and the fruitfulness and growth of our churches.”

3Generate: Methodist Children and Youth Assembly
The report from 3Generate challenged the Church on a range of issues, including transgender rights and pornography. The Conference also heard that the success of the 3Generate event had prompted a move to a bigger venue for this year.

Connexionalism
The Conference also received a major report on connexionalism, and what it means to be a connexional church in the twenty-first century. The Conference recommended the report, and relevant sections of Called to Love and Praise, for study across the Connexion.

The report looks at the challenges to connexionalism, but also the strength and support that it brings. The report says: “For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian.” The report asks hard questions about what connexionalism offers today, and although it offers its own answers, the whole Church is invited to discuss these as well.

Secretary of the Conference
The Conference appointed the Revd Gareth J Powell to serve as the Secretary of the Conference, and the Revd Helen D Cameron to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Conference, both for six years from 1 September.

Fellowship groups
The Methodist Fellowship Groups, congregations of Methodists united by a shared ethnicity or language, announced their intention to grow in deeper relationships, mutual partnerships and genuine integration in a report to the Methodist Conference.

The report, presented by the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, highlighted the importance of being one family with one mission.

About the report, Dr Atkins said, “We are committed to find continuing and healthy ways to harvest the richness brought into our Church by international communities of Methodists. Indeed, every part of the life of the Church is made better because of our life together, and there is much that we can learn from each other.”

Other matters proposed as Notices of Motion were adopted. These include:

- directing that a former presbyter who wishes to return to the active work must first seek reinstatement as a local preacher;
- directing the Council to make arrangements for and oversee
research into the impact and effect of *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission*;

- extending its condolences to the families of those killed in terrorist attacks around the world, offering its prayers for all affected, condemning all forms of violence conducted in the name of religion, supporting efforts at challenging extremist ideologies that seek to undermine the liberties of civil society, and calling upon the Methodist people of Great Britain to engage in constructive dialogue with people of other faiths;

- directing the Council to engage the support of relevant connexional staff and work with Christian peace organisations to hold a web-streamed act of worship to mark 100 years since the right to conscientious objection was enshrined in law;

- assuring Christians around the world of the solidarity and prayers of the Methodist people, advocating protection of the freedom of religion and belief for people of all faiths, recommitting itself to encouraging those political actions that build a safer world where justice and peace ensure security and freedom for all;

- encouraging members of the Methodist Church to make representations regarding future savings in the welfare budget, and encouraging the Council to ensure that the Connexional Team continues to work towards enabling the Methodist Church and its members to speak out alongside those affected by changes in welfare provision and challenge the structural causes of poverty in Britain;

- supporting the “Home for Good” campaign in relation to the need for foster and adoptive families;

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• directing the Council to appoint a working group to prepare a draft Conference Statement and discussion materials appropriate for different age groups on pornography;

• requesting the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment to work with the Central Finance Board to develop clear criteria for possible divestment from fossil fuels companies, and directing the Council to examine how these issues can be raised effectively with Her Majesty’s Government;

• directing the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to ensure that the issues around cohabitation are considered and directing that, should the Conference decide to revisit the Church’s definition of marriage, consideration of cohabitation should form part of the process;

• calling on Methodist churches to consider offering sanctuary to at least one migrant person or family who have reached Europe across the Mediterranean, and directing the Secretary of the Conference to write to Her Majesty’s Government advocating a more generous and compassionate approach to this situation;

• offering prayerful support to the work of the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem.

The Conference referred motions to the Council concerning:

• the payment of National Insurance contributions where an individual has part-time employments with more than one church body;

• the marking of significant anniversaries in 2018 and 2019 for Methodist Homes (MHA) and Action for Children;

• the issue of assisted dying, and whether further work is required in this area.

Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory 2015

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