

## LAY AUTHORISATION (1994)

### Introduction

1. The 1992 Conference received the following Suggestion (52(S)):

The Southampton Synod (R) (Present 232. Vote: 185 for, 47 against) suggests that the first paragraph of SO 011 be amended to read: "A Circuit which considers that (\*any of its churches\*) SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF A CHURCH'S MEMBERSHIP OR OF CHRISTIANS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY are deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (\*through lack of ordained ministers\*) may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or, on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent."

For the sake of clarity, it should be mentioned that, in the Suggestion, words in upper case letters are proposed for inclusion, while words preceded and followed by asterisks are proposed for deletion.

2. The Conference referred this Suggestion to the General Purposes Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, for consideration and report to the Conference of 1993. The Committees were unable to agree upon the terms of a report in time for the 1993 Conference and were given leave to report to the Conference of 1994.
3. The 1993 Conference received the following Memorial (M52):

The Cornwall Synod (R) (Present 180. Vote 114 for, 58 against, 8 neutral) sends the following Memorial to Conference:

"All Lay Workers appointed under SO 581(1) to pastoral and/or evangelistic work, and who are Fully Accredited Local Preachers, may have a dispensation to administer the sacraments whilst so appointed, if so commended by their Circuit Meeting."
4. The Conference referred this Memorial to the General Purposes Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, for consideration and report to the Conference of 1994.
5. This report, which presents replies to the 1992 Suggestion and the 1993 Memorial, was drafted by a joint Working Party. It was assisted in its work by explanatory material from the Southampton District and the Cornwall District and by the response of 25 District Chairmen to a questionnaire about the number of requests for lay authorisations and the context of those requests.
6. It is hoped that, as well as fulfilling the obligation to present replies to the two Districts, this report will also encourage ongoing discussion throughout the Connexion about the issues raised within it.

## **Context**

7. One of the most significant developments in Methodist worship and spirituality in the last twenty to thirty years has been the growing awareness and appreciation of the Lord's Supper, accompanied by more frequent celebrations of it in many churches. The Committees which have prepared this report rejoice in that development and believe that the subject of lay authorisation should be discussed in the context of our understanding of the Holy Communion and in particular what it means to be a 'eucharistic community'. "We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread." (I Cor. 10:17). In and through this sacrament, God in Christ unites us to each other and himself. Discussion about who may preside and with whose authorisation is important; but it is important chiefly because of the importance of the Lord's Supper itself.
8. The context of the present discussion also includes the changes that have been taking place in society, for example, there are more elderly, housebound people, there is more residential accommodation for the elderly, an urgent missionary challenge is increasingly felt in new or older housing estates and in the inner cities.

## **The position since 1932**

9. At Methodist Union an attempt was made to accommodate the divergent traditions of the uniting churches in respect of presidency by persons not ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Initially each church was able to follow its pre-Union practice, but in 1946 the Conference resolved that a common policy for the whole Connexion should be adopted. That policy – that ordained (presbyteral) ministers should normally preside but that named persons other than ordained ministers may be authorised by the Conference to preside in named Circuits – has broadly speaking remained the same for nearly fifty years. Standing Order 011 reads:

A Circuit which considers that any of its churches are deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper through lack of ordained ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan, or on other occasions when authorised by the Superintendent.
10. Numerous reports on the subject of lay authorisation have come to the Conference since 1946, sometimes in response to Suggestions and Memorials. Conferences at which this happened include those of 1960, 1968, 1975, 1976, 1979, 1984, 1985 and 1986. On each occasion, the Conference has explicitly or implicitly affirmed the principle enshrined in the current S.O. 011. It must be admitted, however, that there have been many expressions of disquiet, though for widely differing reasons. We mention five:
11. First, there are those who are in principle happy with S.O. 011 but who feel that its application has not always been just. Many of the Suggestions and Memorials which have been received on the subject have come from Circuits or Districts from which an application has not been granted and where a sense of grievance is felt.

12. Second, there is evidence that lay authorisations, including authorisations to probationer ministers, can cause difficulty in local ecumenical projects, especially those involving Anglicans. At the same time, rather different difficulties occur with the United Reformed Church, where lay authorisation, it is said, is more readily available. For example, a Methodist Lay Worker, having no Methodist authorisation, was given an authorisation to preside in a local United Reformed Church.
13. Third, there are within the Connexion those who believe that there should be no exceptions and that the person presiding at the Lord's Supper should invariably be an ordained presbyter.
14. Fourth, the opposite view is taken by those who regard the possibility of lay administration as an important principle to be preserved among us and who would like to see lay authorisations granted more readily by the Conference. Some, indeed, would prefer the authorising body to be the Circuit Meeting rather than the Conference.
15. Fifth, there are those who feel that S.O. 011 is unduly restrictive in focussing entirely upon 'deprivation' as the ground for authorisation and upon the worship of the local church as the only context in which deprivation might be experienced.
16. It is clearly impossible to devise a Standing Order that would seem satisfactory to holders of all the views set out above. The question remains, however, whether the existing Standing Order is the best that can be devised or whether it could be changed for the better.

#### **Suggestion 52(S)**

17. Suggestion 52(S) does not seek to move the Church away from the long-established understandings (1) that ordained presbyters should normally preside at the Lord's Supper; (2) that authorisations for others to preside should be granted only on grounds of 'deprivation' and (3) that such authorisations are given by the Conference itself to named individuals in named circuits for a limited period.
18. The Suggestion does, however, seek to extend the purposes for which authorisations might be granted. Supporting material from the Southampton District makes it clear that the principal concern that prompted the Suggestion was not local churches deprived of regular Sunday celebrations (the issue which S.O. 011 addresses) but the needs of sick or housebound people in their own homes, in elderly persons' homes, or in hospital. In some areas, it is very difficult for ministers to meet the sacramental needs of all the sick, elderly and housebound. Papers from both the Southampton District and the Cornwall District refer to new opportunities for mission and ministry and the need for Standing Orders that will consistently address these new situations.

#### **Recommendations**

19. The General Purposes and Faith and Order Committees make two recommendations. The first is that the Connexion should make use of the

possibilities presently available to assist in meeting the needs described in paragraph 18.

20. In 1984, the Conference adopted a report, **Extending Communion**, written by the Faith and Order Committee. It appears from other correspondence and from the supporting material from the Southampton District that that report's recommendations are not widely known. This is to be regretted because, in the judgement of the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, those recommendations provide an excellent way of addressing much of the concern which underlies the Suggestion.
21. 'Extended Communion' is a very ancient practice, which goes back at least to the time of Justin Martyr (about 150 AD). Following a celebration of the Lord's Supper in church, some of the remaining elements are taken to the homes of the housebound or sick by the minister or some other appointed person.
22. It is entirely proper for persons other than ordained ministers to take the elements into the homes of those who have been unable to join in the celebration in church, though of course ministers themselves can do this too. It may well be that, in some circuits where there is a heavy demand for home communion, the burden which falls on ministers could be lightened by ministers themselves practising 'Extended Communion' and/or sharing that privilege with others.
23. There has been some criticism of 'Extended Communion' by those who fear the introduction of the reservation of the Sacrament for the purposes of veneration. In reply, it may be said that Methodist spirituality is unlikely to be responsive to such veneration, even if there were any suggestion of its introduction, which there is not. 'Extended Communion' is pastorally most appropriate when the elements are taken out immediately or very shortly after the service in church. (Weekday Communion may sometimes provide the best opportunities for this). As its name suggests, the practice has to do with extending the celebration in church to members of the 'eucharistic community' who have not been able to be present. It has nothing whatever to do with the reservation of bread and wine for veneration.
24. Many testimonies have been received to the effect that the practice of 'Extended Communion' is pastorally beneficial, helping to strengthen housebound members' sense of identity with the worshipping community to which they belong but from which they have been physically separated.
25. So, under our present arrangements, people at home, in elderly persons' homes or in hospital could receive a sacramental ministry in the following ways:
  - a) An ordained minister could preside at a full service in the home or hospital.
  - b) An ordained minister or a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order could bring the elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.

- c) A person with an authorisation to preside within a circuit could, with the Superintendent's permission, preside at a full service in the home or hospital.
  - d) A person with an authorisation to preside within a circuit could bring elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.
  - e) Any person appointed by the Church Council and present at the service could bring elements from a celebration in church into the home or hospital.
26. Our existing procedures could, therefore, be employed to help to meet the needs suggested by Suggestion 52(S). The Committees presenting this report invite the Conference to re-affirm the principle of 'Extended Communion' as it did in adopting the 1984 report. A resolution to this effect follows.
27. An increase in 'Extended Communion' may well be a satisfactory solution to the problem of deprivation in homes or hospitals in some places, but it will not be the answer everywhere. For this reason, and for others, the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee make their second recommendation.
28. In the light of changing patterns of ministry and mission, and the wide variety of views regarding lay authorisations, and, seeking to discover how the Church's sacramental needs at the present time may be met, the General Purposes and Faith and Order Committees recommend that the Conference should invite churches, circuits and districts to discuss the issues raised in this report and to send comments to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee by the end of December 1995, so that a further report may be brought to the Conference of 1996.
29. There are several reasons for this recommendation. One was mentioned in paragraph 27. Another is the complexity of the issues involved, most of which go beyond the brief of the Working Party set up by General Purposes and Faith and Order to draft a reply to Suggestion 52(S). For example, patterns of ministry, lay and ordained, are changing. One District Chairman has described a circuit currently staffed by three itinerant ministers. He envisages that in twenty years' time, the same circuit will have one full-time itinerant minister and seven or eight Ministers in Local Appointments or Lay Workers. That vision may or may not prove to be correct, but it is certainly true that the once familiar pattern has changed already and will change further.
30. A third reason is the wide variety of views held among us regarding lay authorisations (see paragraphs 11-15) and therefore the desirability of wider discussion of the questions posed in the following paragraphs before any change to Standing Order 011 is proposed.

### Questions

31. Among the questions which need to be considered are the following. **Are our existing procedures adequate to meet the eucharistic needs of a Church in which the Lord's Supper is increasingly valued and in which patterns of lay and ordained ministry are continuing to change and develop?**

32. **Is the way in which S.O. 011 is applied in practice satisfactory?** Appendix A to this report reproduces from the 1986 Agenda the Criteria adopted by the Committee on Lay Authorisations in calculating deprivation. Appendix B supplies an extract from the Faith and Order Committee's 1985 report to the Conference on lay authorisations in "missionary situations", which the Committee on Lay Authorisations takes into account in evaluating applications.
33. S.O. 011 regards 'deprivation' as the only acceptable ground for application for lay authorisation, and for this reason that Standing Order has a rather negative tone. **Is it possible or desirable to frame a Standing Order in more positive terms? Are there positive rather than negative reasons for the granting of lay authorisations?**

**Memorial M52 (1993)**

34. This report recommends that no change be made to Standing Order 011 at the present time, but also recommends that Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches be invited to discuss the issues raised in this report and to send their comments to the Faith and Order Committee.
35. If the Conference approves those recommendations, it would clearly be inappropriate, at the start of a period of discussion, to amend Standing Orders as would be required if the Conference wished to adopt the principle proposed by Memorial M52. But there are further reasons why, in the judgment of the General Purposes Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, the Cornwall District's Memorial should not be adopted.
36. First, as we have seen, the long-established usage of Methodism is that ordained (presbyteral) ministers should normally preside at the Lord's Supper. Lay authorisations have been regarded as exceptional. Memorial M52 envisages much more widespread lay authorisation – a significant departure from our usage for which there is no evidence of widespread support among Lay Workers themselves, or generally in the Connexion. Indeed the Cornwall Synod was far from unanimous in recommending this course, as the voting figures show.
37. Second, our usage is that named persons other than ordained ministers may be authorised by the Conference to preside in named Circuits and for a stated period of time. The connexional principle enshrined in this usage is of the utmost importance. Every person who presides at the Lord's Supper in our Connexion is connexionally authorised to do so in one way or another – presbyteral ministers by virtue of their ordination (which the Conference authorised); presbyters of other communions by virtue of their status as 'Recognised and Regarded' or 'Authorised Ministers'; lay people by being authorised by the Conference. Though the Cornwall Memorial is not entirely clear, the use of the word 'commended' suggests that the Memorial envisages that authorisation would still be by the Conference. The significant difference, however, is that the Conference would be expected automatically to grant an authorisation if a Circuit judged it appropriate and the role of the Lay Authorisations Committee would be simply to present names, rather than to evaluate every application.

38. It is true that, unless they themselves request otherwise, probationer ministers are virtually automatically given authorisations and it could be argued that the Cornwall Memorial simply seeks to extend a practice which already exists. But there is an essential difference. Unlike Lay Workers, Probationers have been accepted as suitable candidates for presbyteral ministry, have received initial training, and are preparing themselves to exercise such ministry.
39. Third, however, there has been some concern about instances of people who have offered for presbyteral ministry, whose offers have not been accepted, who have subsequently been appointed as Lay Workers and who have been granted authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper. Thus there are individuals who are exercising in practice a ministry of the Word and Sacraments without being ordained to that ministry (which is true of all lay people authorised under Standing Order 011) but also having been judged unsuitable for it. This state of affairs is unsatisfactory but rare. The adoption of Memorial M52 would allow it to happen more frequently.
40. Fourth, the Memorial makes no reference to 'deprivation', which has been the ground upon which, hitherto, applications have been granted. Adoption of the Memorial would make it possible for circuits to 'commend' Lay Workers for authorisations where no deprivation existed and would thus be a radical departure from our usage. It may be that ongoing discussion will reach the conclusion that grounds other than deprivation should be allowed – or it may not. There is no case for changing Standing Orders in the way required by the Memorial unless and until that conclusion is reached and even if that were to happen, the other points made above would still count against the Memorial.
41. For all these reasons, the Conference is advised not to alter its procedures in the manner suggested by the Cornwall District's Memorial.

### **Conclusion**

42. No change to Standing Orders is proposed at the present time, but resolutions related to the recommendations within this report are appended below.

### **RESOLUTIONS**

The Conference adopts this report and commends it to Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches for discussion.

The Conference adopts this report as its reply to Suggestion 52(S)(1992) and to Memorial M52 (1993).

The Conference re-affirms the principle of 'Extended Communion' and encourages Circuits to consider how 'Extended Communion' may enhance eucharistic ministry within Local Churches and in homes and hospitals.

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to prepare suitable liturgical material for 'Extended Communion' and to report to the Conference of 1995.

The Conference invites Districts, Circuits, and Local Churches to send their comments on the issues raised in this report to the Secretary of the Faith and

Order Committee not later than 31 December 1995 and directs the Faith and Order Committee to present a further report, in the light of the comments received, to the Conference of 1996.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Criteria adopted by the committee on Lay Authorisations in Calculating Deprivation**

In attempting to interpret the definition of basic deprivation contained in the Faith and Order report, the Committee on Lay Authorisation has the difficult task of taking into account many factors. Some can be quantified, others cannot. The extent of the influence of the latter has to rest on the experience and judgement of the members of the Committee, whose recommendation is, of course, subject to the judgement of Conference.

The following 'guidelines' help the Committee in reaching a judgement on basic deprivation as defined in section 1 of the Faith and Order report.

1. The number of churches is calculated on the assumption that a church has two services. If a considerable number of churches in a circuit have only one service per week the number of churches is reduced for the purposes of any calculation. No mathematical formula can be offered, times of services and the number of one service churches have to be borne in mind in arriving at an agreed number of churches figure.
2. The number of ministers is calculated by adding to the number of ministers stationed other ministerial help available. The Committee takes into account evidence of assistance being offered by supernumerary ministers, ministers in other appointments and ministers without pastoral charge. For example, an active supernumerary, with transport, who conducts 13 services a quarter, might be counted as half a minister for the purpose of this calculation.
3. The number of churches is divided by the number of ministers and if the result is five or more a situation of deprivation is deemed to exist.
4. If the result of the calculation is less than five but close to it the Committee takes into consideration the following factors which cannot easily be quantified.
  - (a) A circuit which is widespread and where there is evidence of travel problems.
  - (b) The personal circumstances of individual ministers (e.g. transport available and health).
  - (c) The relative sizes of churches, bearing in mind that a minister is likely to want to conduct more services in a large church than in a lot of smaller churches.
  - (d) Other relevant evidence offered in the submission by the Synod.

5. Similar criteria to the above are used when an application is received in an emergency under S.O. 011 (7).
6. When application for a renewal is received under S.O. 011(5), evidence is sought of the frequency with which a person, who has received an authorisation previously, has conducted the Lord's Supper.

## **APPENDIX B**

The Report of the Faith and Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 recommended the following criteria to be applied in relation to "missionary situations".

1. The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and District support for such a mission, and signs of growth.
2. The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.
3. The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the 'isolated area', living within it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.
4. It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement.

*(Agenda 1994, pp.636-645)*