

Separation of the Minutes of the Annual Conference and the Directory

MC/24/19

Date of meeting	29-30 January 2024
Contact name and details	Joanne Anderton, Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice Laura Kent, Legal Counsel and Data Protection Officer lcp@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Resolutions	19/1. The Council receives the report. 19/2. The Council agrees that the recommendations in this report are to be applied to the distribution of and payment for the <i>Minutes of the Annual Conference</i> and the <i>Directory</i> as separate volumes. 19/3. The Council directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring a revised draft of SO 124 to the next meeting of the Council, in order that the Council can propose it to the Conference. 19/4. The Council directs the Connexional Team to consider whether the <i>Minutes</i> should be published online.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	To confirm the policy for publishing the <i>Minutes of the Annual Conference</i> and the <i>Directory</i> in two separate volumes and to recommend who should be entitled to receive a copy.
Main points	1. The 2023 Conference agreed that the <i>Minutes of the Annual Conference</i> and the <i>Directory</i> should be published in separate volumes so as to ensure that the Methodist Church in Great Britain complies with Data Protection Law and the UK GDPR by keeping the personal data contained within the <i>Directory</i> appropriately confidential. 2. To consider who has a legitimate interest (as defined by the UK GDPR) in having access to the data in the <i>Directory</i> and to confirm that the <i>Directory</i> should only be made available to those persons or category of persons. 3. To consider whether the <i>Minutes</i> should be published online. 4. To confirm the policy for separation of the publication into two volumes so that the Law and Polity Committee can draft the necessary Standing Order amendments for approval by the 2024 Conference.
Consultations	The Law and Polity Committee.

Summary of impact

Standing Orders	Standing Order 124 will need amending.
Financial	There could be a reduction in the printing costs for the <i>Minutes of the Annual Conference</i> and <i>Directory</i> if the Minutes section is published online by default instead of being printed. However, this would need to be balanced against the extra costs which will be incurred by printing the <i>Directory</i> in a separate volume.

Separation of the Minutes of the Annual Conference and the Directory

Background

- 1 Council members may recall paper [MC/23/34\] \(March 2023\)](#) which proposed amendments to Standing Order 124 to provide that the *Minutes of the Annual Conference* and the *Directory* (M&D) be split into two separate volumes for data protection reasons.
- 2 At the 2023 Conference, the Law and Polity Conference Sub-committee advised the Conference not to amend Standing Orders this year, to give time for the UK GDPR implications and policy issues of splitting the M&D to be addressed.
- 3 The 2023 Conference therefore passed Resolution 22/5 [DR 7/17/2] approving the proposal to separate the Minutes from the Directory, and directed the Law and Polity Committee, in consultation with the Methodist Council, to bring the necessary Standing Order amendments to the 2024 Conference.
- 4 In order to draft the Standing Order amendments, the Law and Polity Committee requires clarification from the Council on a number of policy matters.

Current position

- 5 Until 2023, the *Minutes of the Annual Conference* and the *Directory* have been published annually in one volume, split into four parts, containing the following information:

	Description of Data
Part I	The Minutes of the Annual Conference, including the Obituaries.
Part II	The Directory of the Methodist Church, listing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the names of the various Officers of the Conference and their different capacities; 2. the names of the attestors of the Daily Record and the Journal, and the Conference-elected representatives; 3. the names of all the members of the Council, connexional committees, and panels appointed by the Conference; 4. the names, responsibilities and office contact details for the senior/lead members of the Connexional Team; 5. the Stations of all ministers stationed by the Conference.
Part III	General Information, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the current stipend levels; 2. the charitable status details for the Methodist Church in Great Britain and smaller Methodist charities; 3. the calendar of connexional committees and events; 4. the place and date of the next Conference and the District Allocations for representatives to the next Conference; 5. A summary of the current connexional central services budget approved by the Conference; 6. A list of past Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Secretaries of the Conference.
Part IV	Useful Addresses, namely: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the addresses, contact details and station references for every presbyter and deacon in Full Connexion, probationers, and for the ministers of other Churches and Conferences who are Recognised and Regarded as if in Full Connexion; 2. a list of the Chairs and Synod Secretaries for each District and their addresses and contact details; 3. the contact details for the Secretary of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland; 4. the email addresses for the chairs and secretaries/convenors of the Council and

- 6 Currently, copies of the M&D are provided to specified categories of individuals pursuant to Standing Order 124, which is set out below for ease of reference:

SO 124 Publication of Proceedings

- 1) Subject to clause (9) below the general resolutions and other proceedings of the Conference required by clause 37 of the Deed of Union to be printed and published shall be issued as a book under the title of The Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory of the Methodist Church and the year of the Conference concerned.
- (2) It shall be prepared for publication by the Secretary of the Conference.
- (3) *[deleted]*
- (4) Persons whose names and addresses are listed in the Minutes of Conference shall be entitled to have printed any degrees, distinctions or professional qualifications, held by them, of which they have given particulars to the Secretary of the Conference. In the case of degrees, the name of the awarding body shall be stated and the prefix 'Hon' shall be added to all honorary degrees.
- (5) Every minister in the active work and every probationer shall possess a copy, the cost of which shall be an expense recoverable, in the case of persons in appointments within the control of the Church, from the Circuits or other bodies responsible for provision of their stipends.
- (6) A copy shall be presented to every supernumerary, the cost being defrayed by the Methodist Church Fund.
- (7) A copy of the memorial service which incorporates that section of the Minutes of Conference containing the obituary notices of those ministers and probationers who have died shall be presented to the nearest relative of every such person whose obituary is printed in the issue of that year, the cost being defrayed by the Methodist Church Fund.
- (8) A copy shall be presented to the spouse or civil partner of any deceased ministers who makes application, the cost being defrayed by the Methodist Church Fund.

For committee lists to be included in the Conference Agenda and Minutes of Conference see S.O. 204.
For inclusion of names of ministers now in United Churches or autonomous conferences see S.O. 736.
As to obituaries see S.O. 153 and 182.
- (9) Those general resolutions of the Conference embodied in Standing Orders shall be published with the Deed of Union, the Model Trusts and other appropriate texts under the title The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church. Amendments or an amended edition shall be published annually and prepared for publication by the officer for legal and constitutional practice. Every minister in the active work and every probationer shall possess a copy and receive annually the amendments or amended edition, the cost of which shall be an expense recoverable, in the case of persons in appointments within the control of the Church, from the Circuits or other bodies responsible for provision of their stipends.
- (10) Ministers without appointment shall each be entitled, if they obtain the publications specified in clauses (1) and (9) above, to recover the cost of one copy of each per annum from the respective Circuits in which they reside.
- (11) A brief summary of the transactions of the Conference shall be published annually for wide circulation in the Church. This summary shall highlight possible action points for individuals and Local Churches or questions that could be addressed at local level. The cost of publication shall be a charge on the Methodist Church Fund and arrangements for it shall be made by the Methodist Council. Responsibility for the content of the summary shall lie with the person or persons appointed to edit it, who shall be responsible for taking the following action:
 - (i) consulting the Secretary of the Conference on the factual content; and
 - (ii) ensuring that the master copy reaches Methodist Publishing so that it can be distributed by the end of August.

The Conference of 1999 directed that the following note be inserted here: In 1999 the Conference, after debate, adopted a motion directing that reports and publications referred for consultation in the Districts and Circuits should be published by 30th September following the Conference where the business is to come back to the following Conference, and by 30th November in any other case. In giving this direction, the Conference acted on the basis that the responsibility for meeting the deadline lay both with those preparing the material for publication and with the Methodist Publishing House [now Methodist Publishing], and that there might be circumstances in which, despite the best endeavours of all concerned, the deadline could not practically be achieved. For Methodist Publishing, see the details at the beginning of this volume.

(12) Any member of the Conference reporting the public proceedings of the Conference for the news media shall be personally responsible for the information given.

- 7 Currently, therefore, the persons listed in SO 124(5), (6), (7), (8) and (10) are either provided with, or are able to obtain, a full copy of the M&D, including a list of names, addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers of all presbyters and deacons within the Methodist Church. Although some of those listed in SO 124 may have a legitimate interest (as defined by the UK GDPR) to process and use this information, not all of them do.
- 8 Therefore, given the Conference's decision that from this year the M&D are to be produced as separate volumes, it is necessary to establish who has a legitimate interest in receiving, or having access to, a copy of Part IV of the M&D.

Questions for the Council

9 **What should the separate volumes contain?**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Volume 1 (the *Minutes*) contain what is currently in Parts I, II and III of the M&D, and that Volume 2 (the *Directory*) what is currently in Part IV of the M&D.
- 9.2 There has been discussion about whether, for ease of reference, the *Directory* should include a duplicate list of the Stations for ease of cross-referencing. However, this would have cost implications and no-one entitled to receive the *Directory* would not have access to the *Minutes*.

10 **What should the separate volumes be called?**

- 10.1 It is recommended that Volume 1 is called the *Minutes of the Annual Conference* (the *Minutes*) and Volume 2 is called the *Directory* (the *Directory*). This is how most people believe the current M&D to be split, even though technically the current Part II is called "the Directory", and the current Part IV is called "Useful Addresses".

11 **Who should be entitled to receive a copy of Volume 1 (the *Minutes*)?**

- 11.1 The *Minutes* are a matter of public record, therefore everyone is entitled to have access to them if they wish. The question is: who is entitled to receive a copy of the *Minutes* which is paid for either by the Circuit in which they are stationed or by the Methodist Church Fund?
- 11.2 It is recommended that the principles of Standing Order 124 remain as currently drafted in respect of Volume 1, in that everyone who currently receives or is able to receive a copy of the current M&D remains able to receive a copy of the *Minutes* funded in the same way as currently. The *Minutes* would also be available for general sale to the public.

12 **Who should be entitled to receive a copy of Volume 2 (the *Directory*)?**

- 12.1 To answer this question it is necessary to understand who has a legitimate interest in the information contained in Part IV of the current M&D.
- 12.2 On the basis of legitimate interest, it is recommended that the categories of persons entitled to have access to the information in Volume 2 are as follows:
- a) The President, Vice-President, Secretary and other officers of the Conference
 - b) Ministers in the active work and probationers
 - c) Supernumeraries
 - d) Ministers residing abroad
 - e) Ministers without appointment
 - f) Synod Secretaries
 - g) Connexional and District Archivists

- h) Members of the Connexional Council
 - i) Connexional Committee chairs
 - j) Past Presidents and Vice-Presidents
 - k) Other people (to be assessed on a case-by-case basis) who fulfil particular roles on the Church's behalf and who need the data to be able to contact people in order to fulfil their roles and work obligations.
- 12.3 There are some categories of people who have received a copy of the M&D in the past under Standing Order 124, but who do not have a legitimate interest in the data contained within Part IV, namely:
- a) spouses and civil partners of deceased ministers;
 - b) The Methodist Recorder;
 - c) legal deposit libraries.
- 12.4 In respect of the legal deposit libraries, Volume 1 (the *Minutes*) will continue to be sent to these institutions (including the British Library). However, Volume 2 (the *Directory*) will not be required to be sent as it will not be a published work that is released to the public.
- 12.5 It is therefore recommended that the distribution of Volume 2 containing the Directory of Useful Addresses be limited solely to the categories of people listed in paragraph 12.2 above.
- 12.6 Persons in category (k) and other persons not on the list in paragraph 12.2 above who consider that they have a legitimate interest in having access to a copy of Volume 2, should apply to the Secretary of the Conference, who, with the assistance of the Connexional Team's Data Protection Officer, will check whether the reason for the request is sufficient to allow those persons access to the personal data contained in Part IV. In some cases, it may be that the person making the request has a legitimate interest in receiving *some* of the data in Volume 2, but should not receive a copy of the whole of Volume 2. It is therefore recommended that requests should be processed on a case-by-case basis. The Conference Office should keep a list of who has requested and been granted access to a copy of some or all of the data in this way so as to enable the list in paragraph 12.2 above to be reviewed and updated if it transpires that a further category of persons needs to be added.
- 12.7 It is recommended that the distribution of Volume 2 remains funded as currently provided in SO 124. For categories of people not currently listed in SO 124, the costs should be met by the Methodist Church Fund. Of course, Volume 2 will not be available for sale to the public.
- 13 In addition, when the personal data contained in Volume 2 is submitted to the Conference Office for inputting into the *Directory* each year, those whose personal details are to be published should be advised as to where their data will be kept, who it will be sent to, who can have access to it and on what basis (ie legitimate interest). If ministers do not wish to disclose their personal information, they should be asked to provide an alternative email address, phone number and postal address, such as that of the local church or circuit office where they are stationed.

Online vs hard copy publications

- 14 The Council may also wish to consider the possibility of publishing Volume 1 (the *Minutes*) online on the Methodist Church website rather than, or as well as, in hard copy. The information in the *Minutes* would already be in the public domain, meaning there are unlikely to be any confidentiality or copyright issues (although this would need to be expressly confirmed before making the decision to publish online). Online publication would enable the information to be accessed quickly and easily and would align with the Church's 'digital-first' and net zero policies.

Conclusion

- 15 It is important that the Council continues to adhere to its responsibilities to protect personal data and ensures that only those with a legitimate interest are able to process such data.
- 16 The Council is asked to consider the recommendations listed in this paper and to confirm approval to these.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 19/1. The Council receives the report,
- 19/2. The Council agrees that the recommendations in this report are to be applied to the distribution of and payment for the *Minutes of the Annual Conference* and the *Directory* as separate volumes.
- 19/3. The Council directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring a revised draft of SO 124 to the next meeting of the Council, in order that the Council can propose it to the Conference.
- 19/4. The Council directs the Connexional Team to consider whether the *Minutes* should be published online.