

Review of SO 111(3)

MC/23/32

Date of meeting	25-27 March 2023
Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Conference soc@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	32/1. The Council receives the report. 32/2. The Council accepts the recommendations of the Working Party that SO111(3) be removed from CPD and replaced with guidance. 32/3. The Council directs the Working Party to produce draft guidance and to report to the Council in January 2024.

Background

- 1 Standing Order 111(3) is in place for the times when a minister's marriage is breaking down. It currently reads,

The President shall be informed by the Chair of the District of every case of the breakdown of the marriage of a minister. The President shall annually appoint one or more persons to be responsible, on behalf of the President, for ensuring that arrangements are made for such pastoral and material help to be given as may be possible and appropriate in the circumstances, particularly to the wife or husband and family of the minister.
- 2 The current process is as follows. The Conference Office is informed of the breakdown of a minister's marriage; this can be via letter/email to the President from the District Chair, or via communication to the Secretary of the Conference. The spouse of a minister is then assigned a President's representative to provide support. In the case of the breakdown of a marriage where both parties are ministers, a President's representative should be assigned to each to provide pastoral care. Spouses are currently entitled to a half stipend to assist them. The policy is that a maximum of 50% of the annual stipend is paid from the Auxiliary (Special Purposes) Fund. The financial support required will be discussed with the representative. The Director of Finance and Resources is notified of a breakdown of the marriage and the request for payment of a half stipend.
- 3 As many societal factors have changed since the SO was introduced and as the Church's understanding of marriage has developed in that period, it was noted that, as it is currently worded, the Standing Order seems to be out of date. The Ministries Committee was asked to consider if it would be beneficial for the procedure to be reviewed.
- 4 The Ministries Committee appointed a small working party to examine the process when a minister's marriage breaks down, to explore if and in what ways the Standing Order should be revised, and to report to the Council. The Working Party is reporting to the Council with recommendations for changes to the Standing Order.

Working Party Review

- 5 The Working Party (Liz Gamble, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, the Revd Japhet Kabilu, Kate Little, and Deacon Gail Morgan, with the Revd Kerry Tankard who contributed later by e-mail), met at the end of 2022 and in February 2023 and concluded that there needs to be greater clarity around the whole process when a breakdown of a minister's marriage is first notified, especially when both parties are ministers.
- 6 The group suggested that although it is appropriate to have the President notified in the cases, it would also be beneficial if there was a person involved who knew the parties involved, ideally from the local area. A President's Representative is needed but pastoral support provided in the area is valuable.

- 7 The Working Party felt there were specific areas that need greater consideration and clarity.
- Practical needs: including financial support and housing.
 - Pastoral needs: this needs to be available to lay parties as well as ordained.
 - Any additional support that may be required, such as if there are children/ dependents involved.
 - Support for the local church/ congregation.

It was also felt that further reflection needs to be given to the nature of what is the Church's responsibility and what the right level of financial support is required.

Recommendations

- 8 The Working Party agreed that the Standing Order is out of date. It also recognised that there is now a variety of circumstances in which separating couples find themselves and therefore that it would be helpful for more detail to be offered to the Connexion on how these matters should be handled. However, the Working Party was not of a mind that any of that needs to be in a Standing Order.
- 9 The Working Party therefore recommends that SO 111(3) is deleted from CPD.
- 10 The Working Party also recommends that guidance should be included within CPD clearly to explain the process to be followed from the time that the District Chair is informed of the breakdown of a minister's marriage. The guidance should cover the following areas:
- Practical support for the minister(s), spouse and the church community.
 - Pastoral Support
 - Financial Arrangements (including detail on the arrangement to be made when both parties are ministers)
 - Availability of counselling
 - the timelines within which help should be made available
 - Safeguarding matters (dependents involved, mental health and wellbeing aspects, any links to discipline cases)
 - Supervision and support for the President's Representatives

***RESOLUTIONS

32/1. The Council receives the report.

32/2. The Council accepts the recommendations of the Working Party that SO 111(3) be removed from CPD and replaced with guidance.

32/3. The Council directs the Working Party to produce draft guidance and to report to the Council in January 2024.