

- 1 The 2017 Conference received the report of the Methodist Council on what was then known as a “Ministerial Code of Conduct”. The Conference debated it in both Sessions and received the Report, commending the draft material that it presented for wide consultation across the Connexion. Responses were received from 7 Circuits, 10 Districts, and 21 individuals as well as from the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee. Prior to the Conference of 2017, the Methodist Diaconal Order had engaged in conversation around the draft Code.
- 2 The responses received in the feedback from those consultations have led to a number of changes being made. Those changes included
 - (a) amending the title of the work from “Ministerial Code of Conduct” to “Ministerial Covenant” in order to clarify the nature of the material;
 - (b) changing the format of the material from a list of things that an ordained minister ‘should’ do to a series of questions against which ministers can examine themselves with the help of a supervisor or mentor;
 - (c) adding a list of questions against which those who deal with ordained ministers locally or connexionally can examine themselves as to how well they are fulfilling what those ministers might reasonably expect from the Church.
- 3 The Council now presents the revised material to the Conference. It is entitled *The Ministerial Covenant* and is in two parts: the first is an *Introduction* to the process that is being envisaged, how it might be of use in supervision, and how lay people bearing responsibility in dealing with ministers might be encouraged to use it; and the second the *Points for Reflection* about which ordained ministers and those who deal with them might be invited to ponder.
- 4 The Council commends the material to the Conference and, because of the changes that have been made, recommends that the Conference submit it to the wider connexion in a further round of consultation. Whilst that consultation takes place, further work can be done:
 - (a) with the Faith and Order Committee to ensure that the material is consonant with the emphases and details of the 2019 Conference report on *The Theology and Ecclesiology of the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order* and the Conference statement on *Ministry in the Methodist Church* as it emerges from the 2020 Conference;
 - (b) receiving any clarifications offered by the Law and Polity Committee about the relationship between this material and *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Book III Part 11 Complaints and Discipline*;
 - (c) ensuring consonance with the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee;

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- (d) ensuring coordination with the work being undertaken at the behest of the Ministries Committee on ministerial wellbeing.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 35/1. The Conference receives the Report and commends it to the Connexion for study and response.**
- 35/2. The Conference directs the task group to receive responses from Circuit Meetings, District Synods, and the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order by 31 May 2021; and in the light of those responses and the work in conjunction with the Faith and Order, Law and Polity, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, and Ministries Committees detailed in paragraph 4 above, directs the Methodist Council to bring a further report to the Conference in 2022.**

THE MINISTERIAL COVENANT: INTRODUCTION

Basis

- 1 This work is grounded in the Principles of Presbyteral Ministry set out in Standing Order 700, and the Principles of Diaconal Ministry set out in Standing Order 701. In particular, Standing Order 700(2) and 701(2) state that

By receiving persons into Full Connexion as Methodist presbyters/deacons the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them in which they are held accountable by the church in respect of their presbyteral/diaconal ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry. That covenant relationship arises within their existing relationship with the Church as members, which continues, and neither entry into it nor service within it has ever created or is intended to create, or does create, contractual relations.¹

- 2 In this covenant relationship, both the Church and those who are ordained are committed to each other and accountable to each other within their ultimate commitment and accountability to God. That commitment and accountability is embodied both connexionally and locally. Just as a presbyter's or deacon's commitment to the Conference is embodied in the way that she or he serves people in their particular appointments, so the Conference's commitment to a presbyter or deacon is embodied in the way that he or she is used and treated by local churches and their representatives.
- 3 All Methodist presbyters and deacons who are ordained and in Full Connexion are stationed under a common discipline in light of the overall needs and resources (lay and ordained) of the Church. This means that there is a single process of stationing for all presbyters and all deacons respectively with appropriate and equivalent procedures for those serving in each of the various types of appointment. What is fundamental for them all is that each is a Methodist presbyter or deacon living and serving within the covenant relationship that constitutes being in Full Connexion with the Conference. That takes precedence over the different types of appointment and particular terms and conditions of service.
- 4 This requires that those whom the Conference ordains and receives into Full Connexion allow their own needs and gifts to be put into the context of the wider needs of the Kingdom, and allow them to be modified by those wider needs if necessary. John Wesley told his helpers "Go always, not only to those who want (ie need) you, but to those

1 SO 700(2)/701(2) as in 2019 edition of CPD, melded together here for ease.

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who want (ie need) you most". He would also have wanted the Conference to "Send the ministers always, not only to those who need them, but to those who need them most".

- 5 Similarly, those who exercise office and bear responsibility in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and connexional bodies need to allow their own needs and desires to be modified so that they support a minister and enable his or her particular gifts to flourish for the sake of the wider Church and God's kingdom in the world. The weight of maintaining the relationship does not all fall on the ministers. All parties to a covenant make promises and commitments, and there needs to be a regular review of how they are being embodied in practice, to enable both presbyters and deacons on the one hand, and representatives of the various bodies and expressions of the Methodist Church on the other hand to express their accountability to God, to the Church, and to each other.
- 6 Ministers and others therefore need to reflect constantly how what we might term the "Ministerial Covenant" is working out in their situation. Such reflection should be marked by
 - a common commitment to the requirements of the Kingdom;
 - a respect for the perceived needs of both the presbyters and deacons respectively and of the situations requiring their ministry, and at the same time a critical engagement with them both; and
 - a transparency about motives and all material factors affecting the process.

Process

- 7 "Watching over one another in love" is the traditional hallmark of the Methodist experience and understanding of discipleship. It involves a free-will commitment to sharing in the discerning of God's Spirit at work in the world through conferring with others, and a gracious offering of oneself to give and receive the fruits of that discernment so that all may grow in holiness (personal and social) and engage in worship and mission to the best of their ability.
- 8 In other words, it is the Methodist way of exercising oversight. It begins in the promises and commitments made in baptism, confirmation and becoming a member of the Methodist Church. Its classic expression spiritually is in the Covenant Service. Its classic embodiment practically is in class and band meetings (and their modern equivalents), and in the Conference (and its subsidiary meetings in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and the wider Connexion).
- 9 The process of conferring and discerning always has to be open to the Spirit bringing new insights and fresh revelations of truth. But it also has to begin from somewhere; and

it then needs to check that any apparent new insights that emerge are of God. In this, the primary starting point and checking point has always been the Bible. That is why the holiness being overseen is often termed 'scriptural' holiness.

- 10 Early Methodism, as the name suggests, developed its own method of pursuing holiness in worship and mission. That method involved developing guidelines, and setting out aspirations and expectations, which applied the insights of scripture to the lives of the people. These were guidelines not in the sense of a legal code of commandments but of recommended standards for living and touchstones for reflection.
- 11 It is as if Wesley saw "watching over one another in love" as a means of grace. He defined 'means of grace' as "*outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to [sc human beings] preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace*". He then immediately went on to quote the *Book of Common Prayer's* phrase, "the means of grace and the hope of glory" before summarising the *Book of Common Prayer's* definition of sacraments as "an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same"².
- 12 Predominant among this type of reflective material for the early Methodists were *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), *the Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies* (which included the rules for the Class Meeting) (1743); and *the Rules of the Bands* (1744).
- 13 Within the general calling of all the "people called Methodist" to "live by Rule", there were focused callings and guidelines for those performing particular functions (eg "the Rules for Singing") or fulfilling particular offices. Of particular relevance for our current concerns are the group of Anglican priests and lay preachers that Wesley began to gather around him as his itinerant "Helpers" or "Assistants", and with whom he held Conference. Over the years, and particularly as Methodism began to develop from being a movement within the Church of England to being a Church (and then Churches) in its own right, this group gradually developed into an order of ministers.

2 *Standard Sermons number XII* (number 16 in the more recent edition by Outler). In the same sermon Wesley identified the chief of these means of grace as prayer (individual and communal); searching the Scriptures (by reading, hearing and meditating on them); and receiving the Lord's Supper (regularly, and as often as possible). In the Minutes of the 1744 Conference, Wesley added two further ones: fasting; and Christian Conference (which we have more recently termed Christian Conferring). These five things Wesley sometimes called the 'Institutional Means of Grace', in that he found scriptural warrant for them. But he also recognised other things which he called 'Prudential Means of Grace'. These, by their very definition, could vary according to the people, contexts and situations concerned; but they were always directed towards "*watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God*". They included following particular rules of life or engaging in particular acts of holy living.

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- 14 In this process, Wesley's *Twelve Rules of a Helper* (1753, being a revised version of the *Rules of an Assistant*, 1744) were very important, particularly in the Wesleyan tradition. They can be used as a set of tools to enable personal and shared reflection on the experience and practice of ministry.
- 15 Other Methodist traditions expressed this dynamic in their own ways. Since Methodist Union in 1932 the important dynamic of "watching over one another in love" in their ministry, and in exercising accountability and receiving support for it, has been expressed by ordained ministers through staff meetings; the response to the question asked during a communion service at the Presbyteral Session of each District Synod ("Does each of us continue faithfully to discharge the obligations laid upon us by the ministry which we have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God? Do we continue to believe and preach our doctrines and administer our discipline?"); and the answer of each District in the Presbyteral Session of the Conference to the Annual Inquiry about the character and discipline of presbyters and presbyteral probationers. At the time of writing in 2020, a programme for the supervision of all ministers (presbyters and deacons) in the active work is being introduced across the Connexion.
- 16 The whole process has been summed up in the Ordinal for Presbyters in the 1999 Methodist Worship Book. After outlining a number of tasks of presbyteral ministry under the heading "In God's name you are to..." it goes on to say, "These things are your common duty and delight. In them you are to watch over one another in love." The Methodist Diaconal Order also has a clear (or specific) expectation and practice in these matters articulated in the sharing of a common rule of life. The declaration in the diaconal ordination service states that "You are to share fully in the life of your Order and to keep its discipline". The sense of "watching over one another in love" is enacted in the area groups and through the Order's Convocation. The annual inquiry as to the character and discipline of deacons and diaconal probationers is conducted through a rededication service at the Convocation, and assurances then given by the Warden of the Order on behalf of the Convocation to the Conference Diaconal Committee and, thereby, the Conference.
- 17 In recent years attention has been given to outlining the Characteristics, Tasks and Accountability (to God, to the Church, to ordained colleagues and to others) of presbyters and deacons respectively. In 2002 the Conference adopted the report *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*. That report identified the need to discuss the life of the minister in three ways – the fundamental character of the Office to which a presbyter or deacon is called (the main features of which are expressed in the words of the Ordinal); the Being of the minister, by which we mean the *habitus* or intuitive way by which the presbyter or deacon lives out her or his calling; the Functioning of the minister, ie the way in which the presbyter's or deacon's being manifests itself in the tasks of ministry she or he

undertakes. This has led to identifying criteria of competence and standards of practice, so that they can be used by the Church and its ministers in the process of discernment. As a result, the 2003 Conference approved *Criteria for the Selection of Candidates for Ordained Ministry* which were revised by the 2016 Conference.

- 18 What is offered here is a tool to enable presbyters and deacons on the one hand, and, on the other, those representing the Church in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts or other connexional bodies who deal with them or relate to them, to reflect on a particular experience or aspects of the last of those categories (Functioning) in the light of the former two (Office and Being). In order to be clear that the tool relates to our fundamental understanding of what it is to be a presbyter or deacon, the content is laid out according to the revised *Criteria for Selection* and the three dimensions identified in *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*. But because the Ministerial Covenant is a relationship between ministers and those representing the Church and the Conference in some expression or other of the Methodist Church, and because all parties make promises and commitments, questions to prompt reflections on the functioning and performance of those who deal with ministers are included alongside those on the functioning and performance of the ministers.
- 19 None of this will appear unfamiliar to the presbyter or deacon who has nurtured her or his vocation and been faithful in watching over and being watched over in love. *What is a Presbyter?* reminded the Church that ministers are expected to behave “with integrity, competence and according to the best standards of practice towards those to whom she or he ministers.” The same is true of those who have to engage with or relate to presbyters or deacons.
- 20 This material therefore reminds ministers and those who deal with them of the exemplary standards of behaviour which befit their calling as representative people. Occasionally, of course, ministers and others fail to live out their calling in the way that the Church reasonably expects them to do. Those who engage with them in the processes of supervision approved by the Church, those who otherwise have oversight of them, and those who are recipients of their ministry or other forms of discipleship, should find in what follows a canon against which (in)appropriate conduct and (in) competence can be identified and assessed. However, this material should be seen primarily as aspirational; its purpose is not to incite guilt in the practitioner (lay or ordained) but to assist in the reasoned review of self and practice which is part of living and working accountably. It follows that the points for reflection in the Ministerial Covenant are not designed to be a list against which complaints should be made. What they might offer is guidance for those involved in any complaint about the reasonable expectations of the Church in the matters concerned.

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- 21 The commitment to being 'watched over in love' is a key element in discipleship and ministry for all Methodists. Both ordained and lay are in their various ways participants in the programme *Our Calling*, and the points for reflection have been designed with that in mind. Much of the material offered here, however, refers to the exercise of ordained ministry, and care has also been taken to ensure that it coheres with the emerging insights of the 2018 draft Conference statement on *Ministry in the Methodist Church*. It might also be helpful to remember that in its 2017 report to the Conference the working party argued that its content could have a close relationship to the process of supervision. But the covenant relationship between those who are ordained and in Full Connexion and the Conference extends to more than those ministers in the active work. The working party believes, therefore, that all ministers, in the active work, in circuit or non-circuit appointment, or in retirement would benefit from studying and using the material, but that the degree to which it applies to each minister will be proportional to the level of ministry in which each is engaged.
- 22 In the same way, the degree to which the points for reflection directed towards the Church apply to each individual or group who represent the Church locally or connexionally in dealing with ordained ministers will be proportional to the level of engagement which each is meant to have with ministers. There would be great value in such as the Stationing Committee, or groups of circuit stewards or church stewards regularly reviewing their experience and practice in the light of relevant sections of this material. Similarly, District Synods and Circuit Meetings or leadership teams could perhaps meet simultaneously in lay groups and ministerial groups to discuss, respectively, the Questions for Ministers and Questions for the Church in a particular section of the Covenant.

THE MINISTERIAL COVENANT: POINTS FOR REFLECTION**VOCACTION (CALL AND COMMITMENT)³****Office**

'It is the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of Christian ministry depends upon the call of God'.⁴ Throughout the process of candidating and training, men and women are tested on their call and asked if they remain persuaded that God has called them to ordained ministry in the Church. That call to ordained ministry is a particular expression of the vocation to discipleship which is shared by all members of the Church. Those ordained as presbyters and deacons 'focus, express, and enable the ministry of the whole people of God.'⁵

Being

Presbyters and deacons are people who witness to a sense of a distinct call to serve in the ministry to which they are ordained; and who are aware of the need continually to ask to what they are being called and to test the development of their call with others in the Church. They live with a conviction that for them the call to be a presbyter or deacon is part of, and indispensable to, the call to holiness which is common to all disciples but which finds different expression in each; this vocation however is not individualistic but is tested and affirmed by the community of disciples. Ministers therefore seek to discern their developing vocation (eg at times of stationing) in dialogue with the Church and its processes.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)**Questions for ministers' reflection**

- Am I willing to give an account of my call to ordained ministry?
- Am I prepared to explore my developing sense of call with others (eg minister exercising oversight, supervisor, spiritual director)?
- Am I able to affirm each year a continued sense of call to the ordained ministry of Christ's Church?
- Do I recognise that the call to minister is discerned by the individual and by the Church together? Therefore
- Am I committed to listen carefully to the narratives of vocation that others have to offer and to help them to discern their place in the body?

3 The Retreat Association, of which the Methodist Church is a member, provide details on finding spiritual directors, see www.retreats.org.uk.

4 Deed of Union clause 4.

5 *What is a Presbyter?* paragraph 4.

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- How do I review my sense of vocation in the light of the Church's needs in serving God's mission in the world?
- Am I committed to being faithful to the Church's processes of discernment and stationing?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- Do we recognise that the call to ordained ministry is discerned by both the individual and the Church together?
- Are we willing to challenge a stereotypical model of ordained ministry?
- Are we prepared to listen, consider, and where appropriate enable a variety of expressions of ordained ministries that may be discerned?
- Are we committed in stationing to holding the balance between the needs of the Church and the individual gifts and skills of ministers?
- Are we committed to help ministers to discern how they may flourish and thereby enable the Church to flourish through the exercise of their individual gifts and graces?
- Are we willing to resource and develop the specific gifts of each minister so that they may offer those gifts in the ministry and mission of the Church?
- How do we help ensure that each minister is stationed according to their gifts as well as the needs of the Church?

VOCATION (MINISTRY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN GREAT BRITAIN)

Office

Whilst the Methodist Church claims to ordain 'not to a denomination, but to the presbyterate and diaconate of the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church', Methodist presbyters and deacons exercise ministry within and as representatives of the Methodist Church in Britain. This representative ministry is conducted in collaboration with others and in partnership with Christians of other denominations with whom the Methodist Church in Britain is committed to work for a fuller expression of God-given unity.

Being

Deacons are people whose calling is to focus a ministry of witness and service on behalf of the whole Church by enabling the ministry of others. They are required to live according to the Diaconal Order's Rule of Life.

Presbyters are called to a "principal and directing part" in the life of the Church through the ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral responsibility.

All ministers are called to work with colleagues from other denominations in a way which honours the others' positions whilst maintaining their own identity as Methodist.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I work collaboratively with all other members of the Church (presbyters and deacons, lay officers and lay members)? Do I participate (as required by Standing Orders) in regular Circuit staff meetings (or equivalent body) as an expression of collegiality and shared leadership?
- How do I respect and demonstrate respect for the significance and integrity of the ministry of the other order, and of lay officers and members?
- Do I understand the power implicit in the role of minister? Do I use that power appropriately?
- Do I accept that I am accountable for the exercise of the power inherent in my office?
- Do I own the commitment to 'watch over one another in love' through attendance at and participation in the Synod and through less formal gatherings?
- (For deacons) Am I committed to life as a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order?
- Do I remember that my conduct at all times will be seen by others as the behaviour of a representative of the Methodist Church?
- Am I committed to working with ecumenical colleagues in a spirit of trust and openness?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- Are we willing to work collaboratively with ministers in a covenantal rather than a type of 'employer/employee' relationship, recognising that together with the members of the Church we constitute the People of God?
- Do we ensure that all our meetings are providing appropriate opportunities for collegiality and shared leadership?
- Are we aware of any unhealthy power imbalances that are affecting our commitment to collaborative working between all members, lay and ordained, and what appropriate steps are we taking to rectify these where they occur?
- Are we encouraging and seeking to express our God-given unity?
- Are we engaging with Methodist ministers in partnership with other Christian denominations in projects with mission opportunities?

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Office

Presbyters and deacons are first and foremost people of prayer and spirituality. Presbyters and deacons commit themselves at ordination to 'be faithful in worship, in prayer, [and] in

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the reading of the Holy Scriptures.⁶ It is recognised that there are diverse ways in which spirituality can be expressed and nurtured.

Being

Ministers need to nurture a spiritual life that is authentic and disciplined and which is based on a confidence in God's love for them and a sense of the call to perfect holiness. This spiritual life will be manifest in regular engagement with the means of grace in private devotion and in the life of the worshipping community. As for all Methodist disciples, this will include participation in public worship, regular communion, and prayer and Bible study in small groups. Ministers need to be those who are able to receive as well as to give in worship, fellowship, pastoral care, and mission.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Have I a regular and disciplined life of personal prayer?
- How do I express a commitment to the worship of the Church including times when I am not leading worship?
- To whom am I accountable for my life of prayer?
- (For deacons) am I faithful to the Order's common rule of life and use of the Daily Office?
- Am I encouraging a commitment to *Our Calling* and *A Methodist Way of Life*?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- How do we provide time, opportunity, and appropriate encouragement and resources for the spiritual development of Methodist ministers, recognising the breadth of spirituality found among them, and the potential for enriching the spiritual lives of the whole Church in so doing?
- Are we encouraging Methodist ministers to seek out opportunities for prayer and worship, both within and beyond the Methodist Church, which will nourish their relationship with God?
- Are we encouraging a commitment to *Our Calling* and *A Methodist Way of Life*?

⁶ *Methodist Worship Book* pp. 303, 318.

PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

Office

*'This ministry will make great demands upon you.'*⁷ The model is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. Therefore, the life of the ministers can be spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically demanding.

As those who live on the resources of the Church, freely shared by other disciples, ministers are those who are prepared to live simply and so far as their means allow to embody the generosity of Christ.

Being

Ministers need to develop and to maintain the resources to face these demands, not least through living and working within the Church's policy that all ministers should operate under supervision.

They need to understand their own limitations and vulnerability, and recognise their dependence on and experience of grace. They need to care for themselves, and to have the capacity to engage with and to work on areas of perceived weakness.

Presbyters and deacons should live modestly as those for whom the church has provided, conducting their own financial affairs with probity and appropriate transparency.

As representative people they are duty bound to demonstrate the care for the environment and conservation of the resources of the planet that expresses the Church's concern for the integrity of creation.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I meet regularly with a supervisor, share honestly the tensions and joys of ministry, and make effective use of the space to reflect on ministry with a view to improving my practice? How do I take care of myself, maintain reasonable working hours,⁸ and take regular days off and holidays, including my quarter days?⁹
- Do I seek advice and treatment and rest when unwell?
- Do I accept the gift of the sabbatical at appropriate times?

⁷ Methodist Worship Book pp. 302, 317.

⁸ CPD Book VII Guidance, Part 3: Holidays, p. 778.

⁹ Ibid.

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- Am I careful in managing money, keeping accurate records of all receipts of gifts or other monies in addition to my stipend, salary, or pension, and abiding by the Church's policies in relation to occasional fees, gifts, and gratuities?¹⁰
- Am I prudent in the use of material resources?
- Do I take care of the manse with which I have been provided?¹¹

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- In what ways do we hold up before the whole Church the ideal of Christ-like character?
- Are our policies and practices of Supervision, Ministerial Development Reviews, Training, Continuing Development in Ministry, and Safeguarding kept under review and modified accordingly to take account of changing times so that we continue to 'watch over one another in love'?
- Are we careful to ensure that in its processes of Ministerial Supervision, presbyters and deacons are matched with supervisors who can support, encourage, advise, and challenge them, and, where this is not the case, arrange for a more suitable match?
- In the light of the stresses and strains of ministry, in what ways are we providing the necessary pastoral and wellbeing support to Methodist ministers and their households?
- How are we seeking to reduce the pressures on Methodist ministers?
- How are we helping to build the resilience of Methodist ministers to face the changing demands and pressures of ministry?
- How are we helping to ensure that Methodist ministers are housed in manses that are both appropriate to their needs and those of their families, and that their manses and equipment are up to standard and well maintained?¹²

BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

Office

All ministry is relational, including that of those who are ordained.

Both presbyters and deacons are called to have 'unfailing love'¹³ for those amongst whom they minister.

Ministers are people who live in relationship with others and are expected to live in accordance with the church's policies and statements on marriage, family life, and other

¹⁰ SO 801 and 802(5)-(7)

¹¹ Unless in exceptional circumstances permission has been given under SO 803(10) not to live in the manse. For care of the manse, see CPD Book VII Guidance, Part 1.

¹² For the standards of provision, see SO 803 and CPD Book VII Guidance Parts 1 and 2.

¹³ MWB Ordination of Presbyters para 16 p. 306; Ordination of Deacons para 16 p. 321.

relationships. All ministers have other vocations (eg to be spouses or partners, parents, children, siblings, friends, or neighbours) and are called prayerfully to balance their responsibilities to those close to them with the demands of their ministry in and on behalf of the Church.

Being

Ministers need to recognise themselves as whole people who are called to balance the various commitments to those whom they are called to love.

Ministers should be conversant with and live openly in accord with the guidelines on sexual relationships¹⁴ and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Presbyters and deacons should model good, wholesome, and loving relationships and demonstrate discretion in the use of physical contact or expressions of intimacy.

The conduct of the minister should be that of a loving servant who is called to live among those whom she or he may find it easy or difficult to like.

All human relationships have dimensions of power and vulnerability. Ministers should be alert to these and cautious of any words or actions that could be interpreted as an abuse of their power.

Ministers need to be conversant with and to advocate for the Church's policies and practices in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I live faithfully in my personal relationships? Am I clear when and with whom I would need to discuss serious difficulties in or likely breakup of my relationships?
- Am I willing to be vulnerable in order to receive help from the Church family?
- Am I careful to identify and to maintain appropriate boundaries in pastoral relationships?
- Do I conduct all my pastoral work in accordance with the Church's directions and guidance?¹⁵
- Am I conversant with and do I follow the stipulations in the Church's safeguarding policies?¹⁶
- Am I conversant with and do I follow the Church's policies on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion?
- Do I keep accurate and meaningful records of pastoral visits and encounters?¹⁷
- Do I refer to supervision any relationship that might threaten to cross the boundaries of professional, pastoral care?

14 1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality

15 eg see Conference reports, 'With Integrity and Skill' and 'Positive Working Together.'

16 See Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policies-procedure-and-information/policies-and-guidance/>

17 See Code of Safer Working Practice with Adults in Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policies-procedure-and-information/policies-and-guidance/>

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Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- In our covenant relationship with Methodist ministers, how are we exercising our responsibilities towards them so that they feel 'cared for' whilst exercising the Church's care for others? For example:
 - Are Methodist ministers actively involved in all matters relating to their ministry and wellbeing?
 - Do we sufficiently recognise that the manse is primarily a home as well as being a place of work where privacy is to be respected?
 - Are Methodist ministers' study days encouraged and respected?
 - Do we intervene and offer support where Methodist ministers believe they experience bullying, discriminatory, or belittling behaviour?
 - Do we encourage and support Methodist ministers to maintain a healthy work / life balance, eg, to read the Scriptures, pray, study, make time for rest, exercise, and recreation in daily life, and to take regular days off, quarter days, holidays, and sabbaticals?
 - How is pastoral care being offered to the ministerial household?
- In carrying out the Church's safeguarding policies, are those in office being trained to the necessary levels, and provided with the appropriate advice and support when faced with the cases that may arise?
- Are we sufficiently attentive to the wellbeing and mental health of Methodist ministers? What are our policies and practices to offer appropriate help and support before their wellbeing is affected and ill-health ensues?
- What resources do we have to support Methodist ministers and their families when their relationships are in difficulty?

THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY IN GOD'S WORLD

Office

Ministers are called to lead God's people in mission to the world. They are those in whom gifts have been identified which contribute to the fulfilling of the mission of the Church. They are therefore those whose lives are shaped by the calling of the Church to worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism and who seek to reflect theologically on the Church's vocation in the context of the 21st century.

Being

All ministers (whether in circuit or other appointments or without appointment and in all aspects of their ministry) are called to work ecumenically, where possible, to reflect the Methodist Church's understanding of the catholicity of the Church as God's instrument of mission in the world.

Theological reflection is central to the life of the presbyter or deacon. He or she will seek to be informed about the world and to ask where God is at work. Within the broad understanding of what it means to be God's people in this place and time, each minister will develop his or her own theological and other interests and aim to contribute to the life and witness of the Church in particular ways, proclaiming the good news of God's love in ways that are appropriate to their context.

Their political opinions should be informed by the use of reliable and authoritative media. It is wholly inappropriate for ministers to be members of any movements that implicitly or explicitly deny the equality of all God's children.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I speak respectfully of Christians of other denominations and of members of other faith communities?
- Do I look to develop partnerships with members of other churches working with the guidance of connexional and district officers as and when appropriate?
- How am I doing the work of an evangelist?
- Do I engage with social issues in ways that make clear Christ's compassion?
- Do I try to exercise a prophetic ministry in which God's steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace are combined?¹⁸
- Do I seek to avoid language and attitudes that are in any way discriminatory, offensive or liable to incite hatred or inflame tensions?
- Whilst being free to hold and to express party political views, do I seek to avoid denigrating the opinions or motivations of others?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- How are we helping to inspire, train, equip, and empower Methodist ministers with the strategic vision and practical tools to lead the Methodist people in meeting the mission and evangelistic challenges of the twenty-first century?
- In what ways are we encouraging ministers to engage in theological reflection on their ministries, especially in relation to the pressing issues of our times, so as to inform and resource the whole Church in their ministry in God's world?
- How are we enabling Methodist ministers to engage with others in furthering God's mission for human flourishing and the wellbeing of creation?

18 Psalm 85:10

35. The Ministerial Covenant

- How do we support, advise, and empower Methodist ministers to engage in a prophetic ministry in the Church and in the world?

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Office

Presbyters have 'a principal and directing part in [the] great duties [of the Church]'.¹⁹

Deacons 'in many different contexts ... embody, proclaim and point to the transforming love of Christ and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling'.²⁰

Both presbyters and deacons are called to 'accept our discipline and work together with... sisters and brothers in the Church'.²¹ This requires an appropriate degree of both humility and confidence in the way in which leadership is exercised.

Being

Ministers need to have an ability to work with others in a variety of ways. They should be those who work collaboratively with their lay and ordained colleagues in the leadership of churches, Circuits, or other bodies to which they are stationed. They should be able to delegate to others when appropriate.

Ministry in the Methodist Church at times also requires the presbyter or deacon to be able to act decisively on the part of the church, Circuit, or other body and therefore to hold an appropriate understanding of her or his own authority.

The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church orders, regulates, and guides, the work of those who exercise leadership in the life of the Church and all presbyters and deacons are expected to be familiar with its contents.

The covenant relationship is one in which the presbyter or deacon is called to represent the Conference within and beyond the Church. Particularly in the public arena, ministers should uphold the decisions of the Conference and express personal disagreement with those decisions in a manner which is collegial and respectful of the Conference and its officers, demonstrating 'a willingness to work with a dynamic tension of diversity, recognising that openness does not mean that 'anything goes' but is a desire to discern God's will in and for the other and the Church.'²²

¹⁹ Deed of Union clause 4.

²⁰ 2019 Conference *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate* para 2.2.1

²¹ MWB pp. 303, 318.

²² Conference 2006 *Living with Contradictory Convictions*.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I attend and contribute appropriately to the meetings of which I am a member according to the Standing Orders and the constitution of the circuit?
- Do I participate in circuit staff meetings (or the equivalent body) as an expression of collegiality and shared leadership? How do others view my leadership and practical collaboration?
- Do I work with others to ensure that meetings in the life of the Church are properly constituted, effectively administered, and functionally efficient?
- Is my practice of keeping records one that is helpful to me (and, where appropriate, to my colleagues)?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- In what ways do we promote and embody the culture of shared leadership?
- How do we invite and enable participation? How do we support Methodist ministers when circumstances have required that they act decisively, and, when such decisions may later be judged to be ill-advised?
- In what ways do we seek to address bullying?
- In what ways do we seek to address discrimination, including our own unconscious bias?
- Have we recently reviewed the working of our complaints and grievance policies and provisions?

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

Office

Presbyters and deacons are required to undertake duties on behalf of the Church in which it is essential that they can explicitly and lucidly articulate the doctrines of the Christian faith to those who have received the gospel and to those who are yet to receive it. They are also required to engage in the practice of ministry which must be informed by an understanding of the great truths of the Faith and an ability to reflect theologically using a range of resources.

Being

Presbyters and deacons should see themselves as lifelong learners who are constantly engaged in theological reflection. Their regular life should include dedicated times of study, engagement with Scripture and theological texts, and participation in study activities. It is recommended that all ministers identify their own theological interests and pursue them. Ministers should also explore and develop their interests in other avenues of knowledge. Presbyters and deacons will also be those who want to engage with a range of cultural pursuits and activities.

35. The Ministerial Covenant

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- Do I have a programme of Bible reading? Do I maintain habits of study and avail myself of the resources of the Church in developing my skills of theological reflection?
- What are the particular areas of theological reflection with which I feel called to engage? What other fields of study is it helpful for me to pursue?
- What records do I need to keep of my reading and engagements with other media?
- Am I using my study time well?
- Do I participate in the study opportunities offered by the Circuit, District, and Connexion when possible?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- Do we have a programme of Bible reading? Do we maintain habits of study and avail ourselves of the resources of the Church in developing our skills of theological reflection?
- How are we encouraging a culture of lifelong learning and continuing theological reflection among Methodist ministers?
- How are we providing Methodist ministers with the necessary time and resources so that they may actively pursue their theological and other interests?
- How do we encourage ministers to make theological study a priority?
- In what ways are we engaging in the apologetic task?
- In what ways are we taking steps to empower and equip Methodist ministers for mission?

COMMUNICATION

Office

Much of ministry is concerned with speaking about God and, at times, with all humility in the name of God to people within and outside the Church. To articulate the truths of the Christian faith demands the skills of communication. Ministers are those who are constantly learning how to speak with clarity and passion about the Good News of Christ.

Being

Ministers need to be aware of the different methods of communication that are available to them and of the importance of using different methods to speak to people with different learning styles and abilities.

Ministers need to be alert to cultural differences and to those who do not find written or spoken English easy.

Ministers should be aware of the opportunities and the perils of information technology

and social media and be conversant with and careful about using modern methods of communication.

Ministers should remember that whenever they communicate they do so as those who represent the Methodist Church and therefore be careful about what they say, the words that they use to say it, and how it might be repeated and interpreted.

Functioning (In answering any question, consider a practical example or particular experience)

Questions for ministers' reflection

- How do I improve my communication skills? How do I obtain regular feedback on my preaching and other forms of public communication?
- Is my use of information technology and social media competent and appropriate? Am I careful to use words and language appropriate to each particular audience? Do I avoid language or imagery that would be found offensive?
- Am I conversant with and do I abide by the Church's guidance on the use of social media?
- Am I willing to own my own comments?
- Do I keep away from any printed, broadcast, or Internet material that has gratuitously sexual or violent content?

Questions for the Church (local, circuit, district and connexional)

- In what ways are we speaking of God in God's world?
- How are we seeking to improve our communications with all generations? How are we training and equipping ministers so that they understand and, where appropriate, practise the relevant and necessary communication skills for our age of social media and information technology?

35. The Ministerial Covenant

INDEX OF EXISTING GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

What are ministers expected to do/be?

The key theological documents are:

- The ordinal (*The Methodist Worship Book*, pp. 297-328)
- Clause 4 of the Deed of Union – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14766/conf-2019cpd-vol-2.pdf> (pp. 213-214)
- The Conference Statement *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf

Our theology of ministry is further outlined in:

- *Ordination* (1974) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol1_0409.pdf (beginning on p. 108)
- *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_Part1_0409.pdf (beginning on p. 229)
- *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* (2002) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/confreleasing-ministers-for-ministry-2002.pdf
- *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) – www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conferencereports/2005-reports
- *The Covenant Relationship for those who are Ordained and in Full Connexion* (2008) – www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2008-reports
- A slightly revised version of *Part B of Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) will be brought to the 2020 Conference. If adopted as a Conference Statement it will take precedence over the other five reports in this sub-section although they will continue to be key references. *Ministry in the Methodist Church* draws attention to those aspects of the previous reports which remain central to our understanding. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2018-32-Ministry-in-the-Methodist-Church.pdf> (Part B)

Our understanding of the presbyterate is further set out in:

- *What is a Presbyter?* (2002) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-whatis-a-presbyter-2002.pdf

Our understanding of the diaconate (including its relationship with the Methodist Diaconal Order) is contained in:

- *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order* (2019)
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2019-25-Theology-and-Ecclesiology-Underpinning-the-Diaconate.pdf>
- which builds on *The Methodist Diaconal Order* (1993) –
www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_Part1_0409.pdf
(beginning on p. 291)
- and *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate – Interim Report* (2016)
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2016-33-Theology-Underpinning-the-Diaconate.pdf>
- *What is a Deacon?* (2004) remains an important point of reference
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-deacon-2004.pdf>

The Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life

- This is set out in Standing Order 750 (3); CPD Book IV B Part 5; and
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/themethodist-church/the-diaconal-order/living-by-a-rule/>

Criteria, competencies and practical guidance can be found in the following:

- Criteria for the selection of candidates for ordained ministry (2003) –
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11855/g-4-selection-criteria-for-ordained-ministry-in-themethodist-church.pdf>
- Expected competencies at various points in ministry –
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/competencies/>;
including at the point of initial stationing
https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8435/competencies-4_those_entering_first_appointment.pdf, and at the point of reception into full connexion and ordination https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8436/competencies-5_those_ready_to_be_rifc_ordination.pdf
see also the *Handbook for Ministerial Probation* –
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/12355/final-handbook-for-ministerial-probation-2019-2020final.pdf>
- *The Superintendents' Handbook* –
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11077/superintendents-handbook-0319.pdf>

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How are they expected to do / be this?

- With regard to ways of working: *Flexible Patterns of Ministry* (1999) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-flexible-patterns-of-ministry-1999.pdf
- With regard to confidentiality: *With Integrity and Skill* (2008) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf08_18_With_Integrity_and_Skill.pdf
- With regard to development: Ministerial Development Review – www.methodist.org.uk/ministersand-office-holders/leadership-and-ministry/ministerial-development-review
- With regard to conflict and positive working together – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/>
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4291/positive-working-together-long-report-0615.pdf>
- With regard to online presence and behaviour: Social media guidelines – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/technology-and-church/socialmedia-guidelines/>
- With regard to Safeguarding: Policy <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/15910/bookmarksafeguarding-policies-procedures-and-guidance-for-the-methodist-church-october-2019.pdf> plus the learning and recommendations from the Past Cases Review (2015) <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4409/past-cases-review-2013-2015-final.pdf>
For the full resources see also <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/>
- With regard to the well-being and care of ministers (including issues of ill-health, stress, disabilities etc), see <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/wellbeing/ministerswith-ill-health/>

Guidelines and standards regulating the life of the Church as a whole

- Legislation (eg the Equality Act 2010 – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/forchurches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/legislation/>)
See also, Equality, diversity and inclusion guidance – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-andinclusion/>
- Standing Orders (see 700 and 701 for ordained presbyteral and diaconal ministry) – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14766/conf-2019-cpd-vol-2.pdf> (pp. 548-550)
- Handbooks:
Circuit Stewards' Handbook – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/12529/circuit-stewards-handbook-2019.pdf> *Church Stewards' Handbook* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/15203/3321-church-stewards-handbook-2019-4.pdf>