

Update on work from the Conference

MC/22/72

Date of meeting	17-18 October 2022
Contact name and details	Doug Swanney, Connexional Secretary cs@methodistchurch.org.uk

The Council is asked to note the following updates on work from the 2022 Conference and previous Conferences.

1. Memorial M22 (2016): Systems for recording safeguarding cases

M22 Systems for recording safeguarding cases

In light of the revised guidance Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church, the Southend and Leigh (34/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 43; Voting: unanimous) recommends and requests that the Methodist Church develops a secure connexional online system for safeguarding recording and reporting to ensure consistent and effective compliance with data protection legislation, and good practice. This system could be part of the Methodist online suite.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Southend and Leigh Circuit Meeting for highlighting the importance of storing the required safeguarding information and that this be in a secure and compliant environment.

The revised guidance Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church should be followed across the Connexion and is available on the Church website at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1517149/Safeguarding%20recording%20guidance16%2012%2014.pdf>.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to oversee an investigation of the potential feasibility and cost of a system as described in the memorial and to report back no later than the 2018 Conference.

After thorough research and consultation with practitioners, a contract has now been signed with a provider so that a system as described in the memorial can be introduced. The work requested is considered complete and will be reported to the Conference in 2023.

2. Stationing Review

The following have been referred to the Stationing Review Group:

Notice of Motion 2018/205

The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to consider:

(a) *how circuit profiles offered into the stationing matching process might be scrutinised so that those accepted for the process meet the needs of the wider Connexion, as well as those of the Circuit concerned.*

(b) *how the broader stationing issues that the Methodist Church is currently facing might be tackled - in particular, the funding of ministerial appointments and the needs of the most deprived parts of the Connexion, and report to the Conference of 2019.*

The Conference further directs the Methodist Council to work with the Stationing Committee in consideration of part (b) so as to ensure coherence with the work being undertaken on a Connexional Financial Strategy.

Background

The number of circuit stationing profiles for ministers submitted to the Stationing Matching Group now significantly exceeds the number of ministers available to be matched to an appointment. This is making the work of the Stationing Matching Group challenging and demanding, as it seeks to deploy ministerial resources fairly across the Connexion.

The Conference adopted the Motion.

Resolution 2/2b (2020)

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to produce and implement a robust, independent and transparent system for monitoring and reviewing stationing outcomes with regard to EDI concerns and to report to the Conference of 2022.

Notice of Motion 2021/111

The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to continue to work with the EDI Officer and EDI Committee (in whatever form it may be after Conference discusses Report 56: The strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity) to ensure that the structures and procedures of the stationing processes are equally accessible to all.

The Conference further directs that work is done in consultation with the EDI Officer and EDI Committee (in whatever form it may be after Conference discusses Report 56: The strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity) on what “not tolerated” actually means in the Report to the Conference and in the Code of Practice in terms of discrimination within the stationing process.

The Conference directs that the Code of Practice for Stationing states clearly and without ambiguity what sanctions or consequences there might be for situations where discrimination of an individual within stationing can be evidenced and that the EDI Officer is consulted in every such situation.

3. Resolution 21/4 (2019), Memorials M1 and M2 (2019)

Resolution 21/4 from the 2019 Conference directed that a policy be developed concerning the practice of a Circuit being able to reclaim a minister's stipend from the Methodist Church Fund after six months' sick leave. The Conference's reply to Memorials M1 and M2 from 2019 directed the Council to ensure that the policy for the payment of stipends and the provision of a manse for ministers on sick leave as set out in SO 365 and SO 801(4) is reviewed.

These are on the agenda of the Connexional Allowances Committee, which will report to the Council in due course.

4. Memorials M10 and M11 (2019)

The following memorials will be discussed by the Connexional Allowances Committee.

M10 Funding a non-separated Chair

The Isle of Man District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 47; Voting: 46 for, 0 against) draws the Conference's attention to the matter of the cost of funding a non-separated Chair.

The situation with regard to non-separated Chairs has remained the same for some decades now. But it has become clear that the demands, especially those regionally and connexionally, have markedly increased their workload. We celebrate our partnership with the Districts in our region, and with the Learning Network. We recognise, however, that these, and other connexional commitments, take the Chair out of the District far more often than was the case a decade ago.

At present the second superintendents allowance paid to non-separated Chairs is paid from connexional funds, but the entirety of the rest of the stipend is paid by the District/Circuit in which the minister is stationed. Expenses are paid in the same way as any other District.

The Synod asks the Conference to consider contributing to the stipend from connexional funds on a 50/50, half connexional and half district/circuit basis. We believe that this would further re-enforce the Chair's role as a connexional person and release other district/circuit resources to make up the shortfall in ministerial provision.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Isle of Man District Synod for the memorial.

The Synod is correct that the position regarding the funding of the stipend of a non-separated Chair has remained the same for some time. The Connexional Allowances Committee last year considered the situation as a part of its extensive review of allowances above the basic stipend and recommended that there be no change. Given, as the Synod notes, the non-separated Chair's allowance has been set at the same rate as a Superintendent's allowance (under SO 428(2)), it therefore rises to 10% in 2019.

The Synod argues that the allowance was set in a time when the expectations of a Chair was less than it now is. Non-separated Chairs participate in meetings of Chairs and the Connexional Leaders' Forum, share in all stationing matching, and contribute with their peers to the life of the Connexion in various ways. There are some responsibilities (eg, to serve on the Ministerial Candidates' Selection Committee or to represent returning Mission Partners in stationing) that have by custom fallen to the Island Chairs. The Conference is minded to agree that 10% of basic stipend seems a disproportionately small contribution in recognition of this.

The Conference therefore accepts the principle of the Memorial and mandates the Secretary of the Conference to instigate a review of the funding of the stipend arrangements for non-separated Chairs.

M11 Funding a non-separated Chair

The Channel Islands Synod, Representative Session (Present: 37; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the matter of the cost of funding a non-separated Chair when they live on one Island (and therefore in one Circuit) but serve both the District and the Connexion and asks the Conference to take the following action:

The situation with regard to non-separated Chairs has remained the same for some decades now. But it has become clear the demands, especially those connexionally and regionally, have markedly increased their workload. We celebrate our increasing partnership with neighbouring Districts, including in matters of safeguarding, complaints and discipline, candidates and probationers and regionally with the Learning Network. We recognise that these, and other connexional commitments, take them out of the District far more often than a decade ago. At present, the second superintendents allowance paid to non-separated Chairs is paid by central funds, but the entirety of the rest of the stipend is paid by the Circuit the minister is resident in. Expenses are paid in the same way as any other District.

The Synod therefore asks the Conference to consider contributing to the stipend from central funds. This could be funded 50/50, half connexional funds and half from the Circuit. We believe that this would further re-enforce the Chair being a connexional person whilst also recognising locally that this is a shared appointment.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M10.

5. Resolution 2/2a (2020)

The following resolution is being passed to the JDS Scrutiny Group:

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to monitor the extent and effectiveness of the implementation of its three directions in paragraph 5 of section B of its report and to report to the Conference of 2021.

6. Resolution 11/2 (2021)

The Conference directs the Methodist Forces Board and Aldershot Methodist Military Trust to continue their conversations and bring a proposal for a unified body for Methodist engagement with the Armed Forces to the 2022 Conference.

For various reasons, this work has not proved possible, and the Council is asked to approve that it be removed from the workplan.

7. Notice of Motion 2022/206: Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Conference thanks the Methodist Council for the excellent work done on Action for Hope and looks forward to seeing the implementation of this plan of action.

Recognising that new fossil fuel developments are incompatible with efforts to limit global heating to 1.5C according to the UN and International Energy Agency, the Conference:

Supports the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to phase out fossil fuels and support a just transition, which has already been endorsed by Christian Aid, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, and 2,900+ scientists, academics and researchers (<https://fossilfuel treaty.org/endorsements>)

Directs that the President and Vice President write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor expressing opposition to the tax breaks which have been given for new fossil fuel exploration and extraction in the windfall tax legislation.

The Conference adopted the Motion.

The letter directed has been sent.

8. Notice of Motion 2022/202: Ukraine

The Conference:

- 1) laments the ongoing conflict in Ukraine;*
- 2) welcomes the schemes for offering hospitality and welcome to refugees from Ukraine. (Homes for Ukraine, the Super Sponsor schemes of the Welsh and Scottish governments, the Isle of Man Homes for Ukrainian refugees scheme and the Bailiwick of Guernsey Ukraine sponsorship scheme) but notes with concern initial reports of delays in processing applications;*
- 3) notes the long history around the country of Methodists who welcomed the refugee into their towns and communities, and urges churches around the Connexion to consider how they can each welcome refugees (through ideas such as welcome cafes);*
- 4) directs that a letter be sent from the President and Vice-President to HM Government highlighting the need to increase the speed of processing applications for the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme.*

The Conference adopted the Motion.

The letter directed has been sent.

9. Notice of Motion 2022/204

The Conference notes some positive elements of the Government's programmes to assist refugees, such as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Homes for Ukraine, albeit with their limitations and bureaucratic difficulties, but also notes what many perceive to be a hostile response to many refugees who come into the UK by other means, still under international law, to seek asylum. In particular, the Conference is concerned about:

- the criminalisation of some asylum seekers, holding them in detention centres, or electronically tagging them, while their cases are considered;*
- the lack of a right to work;*
- the threat to deport such legal entrants to Rwanda.*

Churches, church leaders, Christians and people of all faiths have been at the forefront of the outcry against such practices and policies. A justice-seeking church which is considering what it means to be 'Walking with Micah' and following a 'Methodist Way of Life' has basic Christian principles and practices of welcome, hospitality and kindness at the heart of what it is and how it exercises ministry.

However, in the light of the current hostile climate the Conference urges churches to take up the challenge to be officially recognised as intentional places of 'Sanctuary'.

The 'Churches of Sanctuary' movement – which is endorsed and supported by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland - follows in the tradition of the 'Cities of Sanctuary' movement begun in 2005, as described in 'Hospitality and Sanctuary for All' by the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal (CTBI 2021). Many Methodist Churches have been involved in their local City of Sanctuary movement. There are many Biblical references affirming the importance of offering hospitality to the stranger (most notably Joshua chapter 20), and churches have historically been known as places of sanctuary, as seen, for example, in the Durham Cathedral knocker and Stratford-Upon-Avon parish sanctuary door knockers, and the sanctuaries offered to families facing deportation from the UK in the 1980s and 1990s.

A Church of Sanctuary will be accredited through the City of Sanctuary movement and will proudly and openly:

- commit to learning facts, listening to people seeking sanctuary, and honouring their stories;*
- evidence an embedded culture of welcome, protective hospitality and safety in every aspect of church worship and witness especially for people seeking sanctuary;*
- encouraging other churches to engage in this way.*

In the light of the above, the Conference:

- urges all churches to consider what it would mean to become a Church of Sanctuary and to take deliberate steps to become recognised as such;*
- directs that information about becoming a Church of Sanctuary be made available through the Methodist website;*
- directs that a letter be sent from the President and Vice-President to the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to draw their attention to the movement for Churches of Sanctuary and to urge Her Majesty's Government to respect more fully the Christian tradition of sanctuary and hospitality towards strangers arriving on our shores.*

The Conference adopted the Motion.

The Team is assisting in preparing resources to support this notice of motion, and the letter that is directed has been sent.

10. Notice of Motion 2022/203: Deportation of asylum seekers and refugees

The Conference:

- 1) expresses its alarm and dismay about the Government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda and its deep concern for refugees who are facing dangers, displaced and without a safe place to call home, only to face the fear of being forcefully deported, and uncertain where they may find themselves;*
- 2) notes that the Right Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, recently wrote, "We must not outsource our ethical responsibilities. We must end this evil trafficking," and endorses this;*
- 3) encourages the Methodist people to be loud and clear in speaking out against such unethical actions and political policies, which go against how Jesus calls us to live our lives and love our neighbours, and to call for justice, mercy and compassion, and for the UK Government to uphold Human Rights and international laws which protect the most vulnerable;*
- 4) urges the Methodist people to hold vulnerable displaced people in prayer and write to their MPs in protest at these actions.*

The Conference adopted the Motion.

Resources will be made available via the website in order to support the action called for in this notice of motion

11. Memorial M11 (2022)

In response to a Memorial brought concerning the situation of tenant farmers, the Conference adopted the following reply:

The Conference thanks the Plymouth and Exeter District for raising important concerns about the position of tenant farmers. The Conference recognises that tenant farmers as both food producers and custodians of our countryside are having to operate under increasingly restrictive tenancy terms and short-term security of occupation. The Conference believes it is important that the management of our agricultural land balances the important needs of ensuring sustainable food production, good environmental and animal welfare practices underpinned with social justice for all those involved in the management of that land whether as owners, tenants or workers and the need to reduce carbon emissions. The Conference is aware of guidance issued jointly by the Tenant Farmers Association and Country Land and Business Association aimed at encouraging tenants and landlords to work together towards ensuring that the joint objectives referred to above are met. (https://tfa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CLA_TFA_Env-agreements-guidance_FINAL.pdf).

The Conference is also aware that the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has established a Tenancy Working Group for England, with Baroness Kate Rock as its Chair, which has been given the task of considering what more the UK Government needs to do to encourage joint working between landlords and tenants and to prevent bad practice. It is also understood that the Welsh Government is planning to establish a similar group later this year. The Conference would certainly wish to support these initiatives to find solutions to the real problems which tenant farmers are currently facing but considers it inappropriate to single out one landlord for particular criticism. The President and Vice-President therefore will communicate to DEFRA the Conference's disquiet at the practices currently being undertaken by some of the country's largest landlords in taking back land from their tenants in order to gain the biggest financial advantage from the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and to the Minister for The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) its request for a review of the new funding policy for farming now that knowledge of unintended consequences is growing.

The letter to DEFRA that is directed in this reply has been sent.

*****RESOLUTION**

72/1. The Council receives the report.