

# Constitution of the Conference

MC/22/38

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	The Revd Michaela Youngson, Assistant Secretary of the Conference <a href="mailto:asc@methodistchurch.org.uk">asc@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>
Membership of the Task Groups	<p><b>2021/22</b> The Revd Michaela Youngson Ms Sandie Smith The Revd Jez Hackett</p> <p><b>2020/21</b> The Revd Rosemarie Clarke Mr Dudley Coates Mr Martin Harker The Revd Stephen Lindridge The Revd Michaela Youngson</p>
Resolutions	<p>38/1. The Council receives the report</p> <p>38/2. The Council recommends to the Conference the proposed model for the Constitution of the Conference as set out in section 6 of this report.</p> <p>38/3. The Council recommends to the Conference the changes in ways of working highlighted in section 9.i-iv of this report and directs the Law and Polity Committee to draft appropriate changes to Standing Orders to enact these changes.</p> <p>38/4. The Council recommends to the Conference that from 2024 the Conference, in its Representative Session, run from a Saturday afternoon until the following Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>38/5. The Council recommends to the Conference Business Committees that they consider the suggestions in section 10 of this report, and implement or further develop these ways of working from the Conference of 2023.</p> <p>38/6. The Council directs that the Conference Planning Executive undertake work regarding the roles of the Record Secretary, Convenor of the Memorials Committee, Journal Secretary and Chair of the Representative Session Business Committee, and bring recommendations to the Council's meeting in January 2023.</p>

## Summary of content

Subject of aims	The aim of the report is to look at the purpose, nature and size of the Conference. It has considered matters of leadership, representation and participation, issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, and the current work on Oversight and Trusteeship within the Methodist
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	Church. It identifies principles that need to be considered when making decisions about the size of the Conference.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of the Conference</li> <li>• Current constitution of the Conference</li> <li>• Considerations relating to the size of the Conference</li> <li>• Proposed model of the constitution of the Conference from 2024</li> <li>• Considerations and ways of working</li> <li>• How we confer</li> </ul>
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>Two task groups have worked on this report – the first being the Methodist Council Appointed Working Group to review the size of the Conference (as required by SO 100(2)). The report from this group is MC/21/38.</p> <p>The second group completed that work, taking into account the work on Oversight and Trusteeship currently being undertaken. The Terms of Reference for the second group are below.</p>

### Summary of impact

Standing Orders	A number of changes to the Standing Orders, including the number and distribution of members of the Conference across a range of categories.
Financial	A decrease in the cost of the Conference.
Wider connexional	Reduction for some Districts in terms of the number of Representatives to the Conference they would be required to elect.
External, including ecumenical	A reduction in the carbon footprint of the Conference. Reduction in number of ecumenical and global associate representatives to the Conference.
Risk	Possible reduction in the diversity of representation to the Conference, mitigated over time by the embedding of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy into the whole life of the Church; and by a reinforcing of the requirement in SO 417(2) that Districts pay appropriate attention to the diversity of those they elect to the Conference.

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Two task groups have worked on this report – the first being the Methodist Council appointed Working Group to review the size of the Conference (as required by SO 100(2)), and the second to complete that work, taking into account the work on Oversight and Trusteeship currently being undertaken. The Terms of Reference for the second group are below and the report of the first group to the Methodist Council is available at. Methodist Council Report MC/21/38 on the Methodist Church website.

## 2 Task Group reviewing the size of the Methodist Conference

### 2.1 Terms of Reference

- i) To do work in light of the Oversight and Trusteeship report to the Conference in 2021 to review the constitution of the Methodist Conference, considering the size that it needs to be to fulfil its responsibilities as a place of conferring, of oversight and as a governing body.
- ii) To give careful consideration to ensure that there is a balanced representation from the Districts and ex officio members, taking into account the Methodist Church's commitment to inclusion and diversity as articulated in the 2021 Conference report, Justice, Dignity and Solidarity;
- iii) To consider any possible amendments that shall be required to the Deed of Union, as a consequence of its recommendations;
- iv) To take into account the issues raised in Annex B to the Council report MC/21/38
- v) To produce a report, with recommendations on the number of members and ways of working, for the Council meeting in January 2022 and a final report for the Conference in 2022.

## 3 The purpose of the Conference

- 3.1 The primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian conferring in order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will.<sup>1</sup>

## 4 The Current Constitution of the Conference

The current number of full voting members (306) of the Conference is determined in SO 100; Clause 14 of the Deed of Union specifies that at least half of the 306 must be lay persons and SO 100 specifies that at least 14 of the 306 must be Deacons (including the Warden). The composition of the Conference is further specified as follows:

- a. Ex-officio members specifically named in clause 14 of the Deed of Union (the three-year Presidency, the Secretary, the Chairs of District, the Warden of the MDO, the President and Secretary of the Irish Conference, two other persons appointed by each of the Irish Conference and the General Conference of the UMC, and two persons chosen from among the associate members appointed by other Churches);
- b. Conference-elected representatives (the number of them is set in SO 101 as nine);
- c. Representatives of the Methodist Youth Assembly (under SOs 102 and 250 these are currently the Youth President and three others elected by the Assembly)
- d. Ex-officio members specified in SO 101 (the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, the Record Secretary, the Journal Secretary, the Convener of the Memorials Committee, and the Chair of the Business Committee);

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<sup>1</sup> As adopted by the Conference of 2006. The full statement on the Purpose of the Methodist Conference is included at Annex A.

- e. Ex-officio members specified in SO 102 (the Chairs of the Methodist Council and the SRC, the Connexional Treasurer, the Connexional Secretaries (currently one), a commissioned forces chaplain, two persons serving overseas, six persons representing EDI interests and one representative of the Faith and Order Committee, of the Law and Polity Committee, of the Stationing Committee and of Methodist Women in Britain respectively);
- f. Persons elected by the Synods (making up the remainder of the 306) – currently around 224 (73%).

SO 105 further specifies that District seats are to be allocated in proportion to the membership in each District except that:

- Each District in England and Wales is entitled to a minimum of four representatives;
- Two island Districts (Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) are each entitled to two representatives; and
- Scotland and Shetland share an allocation of six representatives.

At present, three Districts (Cymru, Bolton and Rochdale, and Cumbria) have only the minimum of four elected members whilst the largest District (London) elects twenty representatives.

In addition to the full members, there are currently six ecumenical associate members and eighteen associate members representing partner churches overseas.

## **5 Considerations relating to the size of the Conference**

- 5.1 The Methodist Conference should be sufficient in size to fulfil its responsibilities as a place of conferring, of oversight and as a governing body. How representative does the Conference need to be to exercise its role of 'adopting formal policies and legislation' (paragraph 4 of Annex A)? For example, would it be sufficient for the elected members of the Conference to be one presbyter and one lay person from each District (plus an appropriate number of deacons)? If so, the present requirements of the Deed of Union would require membership of the Conference to be somewhere between 160 and 180. Given the policies of the church on equality, diversity and inclusion and the need for the Districts to be, and to feel to be, properly represented the question remains as to what an appropriate number of representatives might be.
- 5.2 Currently ex officio members hold 27% of the seats in the Conference. Because more ex-officio seats are held by presbyters than by lay people, and because the Chairs of District must be presbyters, just over 60% of the presbyters in the Conference are elected by the District Synods whereas over 80% of both deacons and lay members are Synod-elected. If there is a wish to reduce the size of the Conference, there is a significant challenge around managing the balances between ministers and lay people and between ex-officio and elected members. It seems clear that the smaller the Conference becomes, the more difficult it is to ensure that the Districts make up a reasonable part of the voting membership of the Conference. This report does not recommend a change to the current position of retaining a 50% balance of lay and ordained persons within the membership of the Conference.
- 5.3 What number below the present membership of 306 is the appropriate size of the Conference, and what should be the criteria for making that decision? To what degree would the Conference be less representative if the largest Districts had only the same number of representatives as the smallest? It is believed that the original intention at Methodist Union in 1932 was that there should be around one member of the Conference for 1000 members of the Church (although this has rarely been achieved in practice). That approach would give a Conference of around 170 members at present. On that model most Districts could probably have three (one presbyter and two lay) elected representatives (plus the Chair) with perhaps ten seats at most being distributed on the basis of membership in the Districts.
- 5.4 In 2021 the Conference adopted the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Strategy, helping move the Church to work in ways which reflect the inclusive nature of God's love. A tension exists when trying to make a body smaller and yet retain or increase its ability to be representative of the diversity of

the Church. Standing Order 417(2) requires members of District Synods, when electing representatives to the Conference, to 'have regard for the composition of the membership of the District as a whole with regard to age, sex and ethnic origin.' In most Districts this Standing Order is read or printed, but unless the list of those standing for election is genuinely diverse, it may have little practical impact. Further steps are needed to enable Districts to ensure that the representatives they elect are diverse. The inclusion of representatives of the Youth Assembly (3Generate) and of people representing the interests of equality, diversity and inclusion helps, but diversity amongst District elected representatives is, from observation, somewhat patchy. The smaller the Conference becomes, and consequently the smaller the number elected by each Synod, the more challenging it will be for Districts to achieve the objective set in SO 417(2). The membership of the Conference is not the only way for diversity to be ensured within the life of its proceedings. Increasingly care is taken to ensure diversity in those who present business, contribute to worship, attend as speakers etc. There is further scope for this to be developed, including in terms of groups who volunteer at the Conference and the staff members that attend from the Connexional Team. Questions remain as to whether a decrease in representatives from particular groups, eg Youth Assembly and Concerns for EDI, will reduce the participation of a diversity of people attending the Conference. It is to be hoped that the embedding of the JDS strategy in the life of the Church will have a long term impact of increasing the diversity of people participating in the Conference and the confidence of those who do attend to take an active role in its business.

- 5.5 It should be noted that the discussion above does not cover associate (non-voting) members of the Conference. There are currently six ecumenical associate members, this allows the Conference to offer hospitality to and receive perspectives from a range of Christian Churches. If the Conference agrees to an overall decrease in numbers, it would seem appropriate that there be a reduction in this group to four associate members. There are also eighteen non-voting representatives of partner Churches in other countries. Whilst work continues on a major consultation with all our partner churches about how we demonstrate our relationship in practical ways – such as attendance at the Conference - it seems appropriate that the number of associate members in this category be reduced to twelve as this is proportionate to the overall reduction in the size of the Conference recommended by this report. This would be in addition to the two full members of the Conference who attend as partner church representatives.
- 5.6 Whilst not the only consideration when discerning the appropriate constitution of the Conference membership, the cost of the Conference is a factor that needs to be considered. This cost is both financial and in terms of our impact on the environment. A reduction in the number of members of the Conference will lead to a reduction in these costs, in terms of accommodation, food, travel and paperwork for each member.
- 5.7 For this year, having taken into account fixed costs, which are not dependent on the number of representatives (though a smaller Conference may also have an impact on costs of venues required), the average cost per representative is £1,216.50. The return to the Hilton in 2023 will involve a higher per person cost.
- 5.8 If the Conference was made up of 220 full representatives the saving for 2022 would be £133,760. This is a significant saving against the connexional budget. Reducing the number of associate members by eight would save a further £9,732 (not taking into account any travel costs into the UK). A small reduction in the number of volunteers required at the Conference would also offer savings against the cost of a Conference in its current constitution. The overall cost of the Conference is approximately £600,000 this year, so the approximate cost saving of £145,000+ is not insignificant.
- 5.9 The work on the constitution of the Conference has not taken place in isolation from that on Oversight and Trusteeship. If, as proposed, the Conference's role as a trustee body is transferred to the new Connexional Council, then there should be a concomitant reduction in the business the Conference is required to do. This can benefit the Conference in allowing a reduction in working hours and/or an increase in the capacity of the Conference to confer on significant issues and to meet its purpose of discerning the will of God. An increase in en bloc business, the possibility of on-line workshops prior to the Conference meeting and a change in the way that Notices of Motion are

presented (see section 9), may also allow for the Conference to meet over a shorter time period.

5.10 The work being undertaken regarding the number of Districts may well result in a reduction to the number of Chairs attending the Conference. This report proposes that any reduction in the number of Chairs not impact on the overall number of representatives to the Conference. This would allow a reduction in the ex-officio element of the Conference membership and a balancing of the lay/ordained representation from the Synods.

## 6 Proposed model for the constitution of the Conference from 2024

6.1 Based on the current distribution of districts. This represents a small increase (2%) in the ratio between ex-officio categories and district reps. This should change to a decrease if at any point the number of Chairs of District attending the Conference reduces.

\*Indicates a change to Clause 14 of the Deed of Union and would therefore require Special Resolutions should there be any proposed amendments to that category.

Role/Category	Current Number	Revised Number
Presidency*	6	6
Secretary of Conference*	1	1
Chairs of District*	30	30
Warden of the Diaconal Order*	1	1
Irish Methodist Church Reps*	4	4
Global Relationships*	2	2
UMC Reps	2	1
Conference Elected	9	3
Youth Assembly	4	2
Assistant Secretary of Conference	1	1
COLCP	1	1
Record Secretary	1	1
Journal Secretary	1	1
Memorials Cttee Convenor	1	1
Chair of Rep Session Business Cttee	1	1
Methodist Council Chair	1	0
SRC Chair	1	0
Connexional Council Chair	0	1
Forces Chaplain	1	1
Connexional Treasurer	1	1
Connexional Secretary	1	1
Mission Partners (serving)	2	1
EDI	6	3
Secretary of Faith and Order	1	1
Law and Polity	1	1
Stationing Committee	1	0
MWIB	1	0
Total Ex-Officio	82 (27%)	68 (30%)
Synods	224	152
Totals	306	220

Ecumenical Reps Assoc	6	4
Global Relationships Assoc	18	12

## 7 Notes to the proposed model

7.1 It may be possible to retain or reduce the ratio of ex-officio categories to synod appointed reps, however a number of these categories represent those things that the Conference has previously deemed to be priorities within its life and the life of the Church, therefore the model above is



conservative in its approach, whilst reducing or removing categories of representation which the Church will need to ensure are included in our life in other ways.

- 7.2 The removal of SRC and Methodist Council (as proposed in the Oversight and Trusteeship Report), replaced by a Connexional Council, reduces the ex-officio category by 1. However, the proposal that all members of the Connexional Council be members of the Conference has not been factored into this calculation. Should the Conference decide that all members of the proposed Connexional Council will be members of the Conference, then the balance of lay/ordained will be maintained through the Synod allocations. Some Council members will already be members of the Conference through other categories, any increase in the ex-officio element of Conference membership will be off-set should the number of District Chairs attending the Conference be reduced.
- 7.3 A reduction in EDI, Youth Assembly and Conference Elected, UMC and voting World Church Representatives reflects the overall reduction in the size of the Conference membership.
- 7.4 A suggested reduction in EDI reps does not represent a reduction in the Conference's commitment to matters of justice, dignity and solidarity which are being implemented in the life of the Church through the JDS Strategy. The embedding of that strategy requires the Districts to pay attention to the diversity of the representatives each sends to the Conference.
- 7.5 Removal of the Chair of the Stationing Committee does not prevent that role-holder from attending the Conference should they have business to present.
- 7.6 Methodist Women in Britain has a presence at the Conference through fringe events and through reps from the districts who happen to be members of MWIB – as an organisation they are not required to report to the Conference.
- 7.7 Further work could be done on the roles of Record Secretary, Convenor of the Memorials Committee Journal Secretary, and Chair of the Representative Session Business Committee, particularly in terms of whether they can be found within the body of the membership of Conference, without having separate ex-officio categories. The impact of removing one or more of these categories would be marginal but not insignificant in terms of cost but would have a positive impact on the ex-officio/elected ratio within the membership of the Conference.

## **8 Synod Representation**

- 8.1 A number of the larger Synods find it difficult to appoint their required number of representatives. It seems important that the island districts retain their current allocation of two reps, Scotland and Shetland Districts their combined allocation of six and that no other district have less than four representatives. The remaining allocation should be calculated by District membership, with no District having more than eleven representatives, not including their District Chair.
- 8.2 A shorter Conference, with some on-line participation between the annual meetings, may enable a broader representation of representatives of working age.

## **9 Considerations and ways of workings**

- 9.1 The number of members and the time allowed for the Conference need to ensure that it retain the sense of being a significant 'occasion' – the Election of the President and Vice President, the Reception into Full Connexion and the significant acts of worship may be diminished by a greater reduction in numbers than that proposed above. If the Connexional Council comes into being as the trustee body of the Church, then the role of the celebratory events at the Conference can take a greater focus, as the quantity of business might be reduced. Reducing the essential business will also allow for greater conferring on particular matters, even if the number of days meeting is reduced.

9.2 The length of sessions might be reduced (and therefore the number of days meeting) and greater participation of members enabled if:

- I. The Connexional Council processes work that currently has to be done by the Conference as trustee body;
- II. There is an increase in the number of en bloc items;
- III. Non-emergency Notices of Motion are submitted to a deadline (eg three weeks prior to the Conference meeting).

This would allow

- a. advice to be given to proposers and seconders about the most appropriate wording to achieve their aim (reducing workload for Conference officers during the Conference itself);
  - b. relevant bodies time to undertake initial research to enable Conference to be fully informed in debate;
  - c. impact assessments to be done regarding financial and capacity costs of accepting a NoM;
  - d. the NoMs to be circulated (electronically) to members of the Conference for consideration in advance of meeting;
  - e. the relevant Business Committee to prioritise and group NoMs in a way that makes most sense within the business of the Conference.
- IV. Those who will be members of the Conference by dint of office or election are invited to participate in conferring groups on particular themes (eg Missions, Ministries, Resourcing), meeting online during the year leading up to the Conference to which they are elected/appointed. This would allow a 'green paper' approach to pieces of work and greater participation at an earlier stage. This would be for work to be brought for the Conference to which they were elected/appointed. These groups would not be established for decision-making. If the Conference were to need to meet in full because of an extraordinary circumstance, the membership for that situation would be those deemed members by the Conference to which they were elected or appointed as confirmed on the opening day of the relevant Session of the Conference.

9.3 If the Conference is smaller than at present and able to work in some or all of the ways in i – iv above, it seems it would be possible for it to reduce the number of days for business. This should enable a greater diversity of participation and a reduction in costs. Recognising that a great deal of work needs to be done by a number of people during the Conference and that much of this has to be done in between the public sessions eg meetings of Conference sub-committees, preparation of papers, rehearsals for worship, it is not recommended that the current structure of the timetable be radically altered.

9.4 It is recommended that from 2024, the Representative Session of the Conference will meet from the afternoon of Saturday until after lunch on the following Wednesday.

9.5 It is the recommendation of this report that the Presbyteral Session remain the same length as at the moment – its members are there as part of their ministerial role (the majority do not need time off from other activities) and any cost savings of shortening the hours are marginal as even if the business were contained within a day, most people would still require overnight accommodation. To reduce to one day would mean that the only elements that could be included in the timetable would be the Service of Thanksgiving, the Pastoral Address and the business of the closed session. The opportunities for presbyters to engage together in depth about mission and ministry would be lost.

## 10 How we confer

10.1 In terms of how the Conference does its business whilst meeting in person, it is clear that some people feel more comfortable than others when faced with speaking at a podium in front of a large group of people. The Conference has used group work well in recent years to facilitate increased participation. This is to be encouraged, as also might be the use of a 'roving microphone' following informal 'buzz' conversations. Whilst only based on anecdotal observations, this more informal approach has enabled a wider diversity of participation when occasionally used in the past.



10.2 The language of 'debate' is not helpful when trying to establish the Conference as a space for Christian conferring. Whilst at times it is clear there are differences of opinion within the Conference over particular matters, a shift to language that uses words such as conversation, and avoids a 'for and against' tone may help the Conference in its work of discernment and engagement.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 38/1. The Council receives the report
- 38/2. The Council recommends to the Conference the proposed model for the Constitution of the Conference as set out in section 6 of this report.
- 38/3. The Council recommends to the Conference the changes in ways of working highlighted in section 9.i-iv of this report and directs the Law and Polity Committee to draft appropriate changes to Standing Orders to enact these changes.
- 38/4. The Council recommends to the Conference that from 2024 the Conference, in its Representative Session, run from a Saturday afternoon until the following Wednesday afternoon.
- 38/5. The Council recommends to the Conference Business Committees that they consider the suggestions in section 10 of this report, and implement or further develop these ways of working from the Conference of 2023.
- 38/6. The Council directs that the Conference Planning Executive undertake work regarding the roles of the Record Secretary, Convenor of the Memorials Committee, Journal Secretary and Chair of the Representative Session Business Committee, and bring recommendations to the Council's meeting in January 2023.

# Annex A

The Purpose of the Methodist Conference (as adopted by the Conference of 2006)

1. Methodism began as a movement of people connected with John Wesley (“the Connexion”) which was structured for mission and discipleship, and which eventually became a Church. The origins of the Methodist Conference lie in a series of meetings which John Wesley held with his Preachers, Helpers and Assistants as the movement developed. In these meetings they sought to discern the movements of the Spirit and the promptings of grace, and to shape and regulate ways of responding to them in worship and mission. The means of doing this was through a process of “Christian Conferring” which Wesley also saw operating when people gathered together in a Class Meeting or Band to help each other in their Christian experience and to support each other in their discipleship; and when the Travelling Preachers visited and met with the Class Leaders to oversee and support them in their task. In the Class Meeting and Band the basic questions for this Christian Conferring can be expressed in modern terms as “Where is God in our experience? What is God doing? What is God calling or prompting us to do?”. In the first Conference which Wesley held with the Preachers in 1744 this type of question was applied to the task of the Preachers and so took the form “What to teach? How to teach? What to do?”, or, in other words, the content, methodology and strategic organisation of mission.

2. As a result, the Conference primarily exists to exercise oversight in the broadest sense of the term. It seeks to focus, renew and nurture the whole connexion’s worship of God and participation in God’s mission. In doing so it seeks to ensure that the whole Connexion remains true to its calling and to its experience and place in an apostolic succession of faithful response and witness to the Gospel. In this its teaching role is still of paramount importance, both in formulating what is to be taught and ensuring that it is shared with all the Methodist people. The Conference therefore stands at the heart of the Connexion, connecting it with its past and its future, linking it with external bodies and joining together its constituent parts.

3. As noted above, one way in which the Conference exercises that general oversight is in formulating and overseeing strategies for responding to God’s will throughout the whole Connexion. In doing this, the Conference is being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God. This is the role ascribed to it in such foundational documents as The Deed of Union (first adopted in 1932 and amended from time to time by subsequent Conferences) and The Methodist Church Act 1976, and involves responsibility for the “government, discipline, management and administration”<sup>2</sup> of the Church’s affairs.

4. The Conference Review Group believes that this aspect of being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God is extremely important. Much of the activity of the Conference consists of the exercise of governance or formal authority. The Conference does this directly through adopting formal policies and legislation. It also does it indirectly by setting the parameters and structures of accountability and support for other bodies to exercise authority in its name in particular places or areas of work. Similarly with regard to management, the role of the Conference is to set a framework of clear policies and purposes, authorising and permitting others to exercise management directly, and seeking to ensure that they do so under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship. The direct exercise of management is the duty of those other individuals and groups. It is their responsibility to formulate specific and detailed strategies for enacting the Conference’s policies and fulfilling its purposes; for setting particular objectives concerning the implementation of those strategies; for deploying human, material and technological resources to achieve those objectives; and for monitoring and assessing the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the objectives.

5. Another way in which the Conference expresses oversight is in the collective exercise of leadership. This involves harvesting the insights of its members, inspiring them to be imaginative and empowering them to share their ideas and develop new vision. It then involves the Conference in providing a model for the rest of the Connexion of articulating vision, of initiating action and encouraging people to follow, and of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.

6. All of these aspects of oversight involve waiting on God. For this to happen there has to be space in the overall timetable for there to be times of spontaneous prayer, praise and contemplation as well as formal prayer and structured worship. But waiting on God also occurs through Christian Conferring. This involves people taking spiritual, theological and practical counsel together and engaging in processes of

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<sup>2</sup> Deed of Union Clause 18

intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue that lead to collective decision-making. Some of this occurs informally through people meeting each other over meals and at fringe and other events around the sessions of the Conference. Much of it occurs in the formal business of the Conference itself as people seek to discern the will and activity of God through paying attention to each other's insights and experience. The Conference should primarily be looking for the inspiration of the Spirit, and in the light of that to lift the spirits of its members and provide inspiration for the whole Connexion.

7. The Review Group therefore recommends that the Conference affirm that the primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian Conferring in order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will. This purpose should inform and influence everything that the Conference does.