

Future Direction of the Methodist Forces Board (MFB)

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1. Aim

To set out a future model for governance and oversight of Methodist Forces and Cadet Forces Chaplaincy.

2. Current Situation

- 2.1 In January 2021, the Methodist Council approved the strategy of the Methodist Forces Board 2020-2025 contained within the paper MC/21/6 and in accordance with SO 1007. That paper also made reference to resolution 10/2 of the 2020 Conference that ‘the Conference directs the Methodist Forces Board (MFB) and Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) to bring a proposal for a unified body for Methodist engagement with the Armed Forces to the 2021 Conference’. However, it has become clear following a number of conversations between the MFB and AMMT that despite our best efforts we have not yet been able to make headway.
- 2.2 Changes to the Methodist Church’s way of working, and a number of changes within the MFB offer the opportunity to make some strategic decisions now that will enable the MFB to be put on a stronger footing within the life of the Church for the foreseeable future. This paper is the first part of that process as it is anticipated that decisions will lead to new policy and the re-writing of Standing Orders.

3. Future Proposals

3.1 The Chair of the MFB

The Chair of the MFB for the past twelve years has been the Connexional Secretary. This includes three Board meetings per annum, attendance at the annual Tri-Service Conference, and occasional visits to Service establishments. The Chair has also had a short monthly meeting with the Secretary of the Board to provide space for reflection and advice. Whilst this has worked well the roles of ordained ministry and oversight thereof traditionally and most naturally sit within the purview of the Secretariat of the Conference Office.

It is proposed that from the connexional year 2022/23 the Chair of the MFB becomes the ex-President, ie the year after their presidency finishes. This will ensure that the Chair of the MFB has up-to-date knowledge of the work of the MFB, further embed this ministry within the life of the Church, and relieve some of the workload of the Connexional Secretary. (As a minimum they will have attended an Armed Forces acquaint visit and met the most recent cohort of Forces Chaplains at the Tri-Service Conference.) This commitment would normally consist of chairing three Board meetings per annum.

3.2 Role of the Secretary of the Forces Board (SFB)

The Methodist Council delegates the general oversight of Forces Chaplains (FC) to the MFB (SO 1007). This duty is discharged on a daily basis through the SFB. This includes: holding the MFB

Supervision Implementation Panel; administering the Forces Chaplaincy stationing process from initial enquiry through to selection; informing forces chaplains of Conference decisions and other factors that may impact on the ministry they offer in the name of the Methodist Church and fielding questions around connexional policy; representing the Methodist Church to the Ministry of Defence and to ecumenical partners. The MFB is accountable as a committee of the Council, and reports annually to the Conference.

It is proposed that during this connexional year the oversight of the work of the SFB becomes the responsibility of the Assistant Secretary of the Conference. This is a more natural fit in terms of oversight of ordained ministry as it emphasizes that this is part of the Church's 'appointed' ministries rather than a form of ministry where ministers are 'permitted or authorised to serve' (MC/20/48).

3.3 Role of the MFB

The role of the MFB will remain essentially the same, although it is expected that the revised Standing Order will elucidate some things that are tacitly understood only within the collective memory. This is important in ensuring that the work of the MFB is further understood and embedded within the life of the Church. The Board is a Committee of the Council and its members are annually appointed by the Council. There is no trustee liability and the MFB money is held within the Central Services Budget with the SFB the designated budget holder. The use of the word 'Board' is universally understood within the military to cover the breadth of the work undertaken by the MFB. Moreover, the title 'MFB' has a long-standing tradition throughout the military.

The following changes to the MFB are proposed:

- Forces Chaplains returning to circuit ministry will be represented by the Chair designated by the Chairs meeting and will be the same as the one who represents returning mission partners (and that this should be written in to the stationing protocols).
- that the MFB consists of: the Chair, Secretary, the Secretary of the Conference or her/his nominee, the three Principal Chaplains¹, a Forces Chaplain (for a two-year period, rotating through the three Services), a Cadet Force Chaplain (for a one-year period, rotating through the cadet forces), at least two lay Methodist members (one of whom will have responsibility for *Worship: Leading & Preaching* within the Services).
- twice yearly meetings are organized by the SFB with Cadet Force chaplains.

All Forces Chaplains should attend the Methodist Tri-Service Conference unless they are unable for reasons of deployment or illness. Additionally, Chaplains are encouraged to attend the District synod where they are posted, and the District Chair is encouraged to invite these chaplains (where advised) to attend their local synod. (Where chaplains are serving overseas they encouraged, where possible, to attend the synod of the district where they last resided.) It is hoped that this will enable the sharing of knowledge, understanding, and mutual support within the life of the Church.

¹ This consists of the Principal Denominational Chaplain from the Army, and the two appointed CSFC (Church of Scotland and Free Churches) chaplains for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Where one or more of the CSFC chaplains are not Methodist they may send a Methodist Chaplain to attend the MFB. Similarly, the SFB may request the attendance of a Methodist chaplain at the MFB.

4. Way Ahead

This paper builds on conversations between the Chair and Secretary of the MFB, the Secretary of the Conference, the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the senior Methodist Forces Chaplains, a number of Cadet Force Chaplains, and the MFB November Board meeting. The proposals below set before the January 2022 meeting of the Methodist Council for consideration. If proposals are accepted Standing Orders will need to be updated.

5. Proposals within the Future Model

For ease of reference the proposals contained within this paper relating to the governance and oversight of Forces Chaplaincy are listed here:

- The ex-President chairs the MFB for the year following their presidency.
- the work of the SFB transfers to the oversight of the Conference Office under the Assistant Secretary of the Conference.
- The Chair designated to represent returning mission partners in stationing also represents Forces Chaplains returning to circuit ministry.
- That the MFB consists of; the Chair, Secretary, the Secretary of the Conference or her/his nominee, the three Principal Chaplains, a Forces Chaplain (for a two-year period, rotating through the three Services), a Cadet Force Chaplain (for a one-year period, rotating through the cadet forces), at least two lay Methodist members (one of whom will have responsibility for *Worship: Leading & Preaching* within the Services).
- Twice yearly meetings will be held with Cadet Force chaplains.
- Chaplains are encouraged to attend the District Synod where they are posted, and the District Chair is encouraged to invite these chaplains (where advised) to attend their local Synod. (Where chaplains are serving overseas they encouraged, where possible, to attend the synod of the district where they last resided.) It is hoped that this will enable the sharing of knowledge, understanding, and mutual support within the life of the Church.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

32/1. The Council receives the report.

32/2. The Council approves the proposals as set out in the report and directs that the work is undertaken to bring the necessary Standing Order amendments to the Conference to effect these changes.