

## Report from the Faith and Order Committee: The office of Vice-President

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### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	The office of Vice-President
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	Memorial 1, 2011 (found at <a href="https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-reports/conference-reports-2011/">https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-reports/conference-reports-2011/</a> ) <i>Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference, 2010</i> ( <a href="https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/confrep-8-leading-presiding-170510.pdf">https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/confrep-8-leading-presiding-170510.pdf</a> ) <i>Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference, 2011</i> ( <a href="https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-57-leading-and-presiding-0511.pdf">https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-57-leading-and-presiding-0511.pdf</a> )

### The Office of Vice-President

1. The 2011 Conference directed that the Methodist Council, Convocation and the Faith and Order Committee review, report and make recommendations to a subsequent Conference about the question of whether the office of Vice-President should be open to deacons. This matter was put on hold in the light of the work regarding the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate. It now needs to be considered.
2. The original Memorial (M1, 2011) responded to the 2010 Conference report *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference* and the recommendations it refers to were superseded by subsequent decisions, but the central question remains the same. The memorial states it thus:

“We regret that the Conference report ... did not pursue the option that follows from its own words ‘*The office of Vice-President is highly valued as an affirmation of the laity in the Church, but some feel that the fact that it is open also to ordained deacons diminishes that affirmation. Some have suggested that the diaconal calling means that deacons should not aspire to senior office*’. Moreover, we believe that deacons’ membership of and commitment to a Rule of Life within a Religious Order, coupled with their focus on the servant ministry, is not consonant with aspiration to such office, and therefore that Vice-Presidency is a privilege they should willingly forgo upon entry into the Order.”

Alternatively, others insist that the diaconate also needs to be affirmed by a deacon being elected to a high office of the Conference.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference* (2010), 2.1.

3. The Faith and Order Committee notes that this matter has been explored previously. Responding to the perception that many felt it anomalous that the office of Vice-President should be open to deacons as well as lay people (due to it often being spoken of as ‘the highest lay office in the Church’<sup>2</sup>), the 2010 Conference received a proposal that “there should regularly be two Co-Presidents, one a deacon and the other a lay person, thus affirming both diaconate and laity, although it allowed that some might consider this inappropriate, either because of potential cost, or because of doubts about the number of candidates the Diaconal Order might be able to offer over time, or because it effectively reduced the lay contribution to Presidential leadership from one half to one third. The report therefore offered the Conference a choice between a three-person Presidency (presbyter, deacon and lay person) and a two-person version (presbyter and either a deacon or a lay person). That choice was referred to the Synods and Youth Assembly.”<sup>3</sup>
4. The results of that consultation revealed a clear preference for a two-person Presidency, with the office of Vice-President open to either a lay person or a deacon. The Conference was not asked, however, to consider whether deacons should not be eligible for the office of Vice-President.
5. The Faith and Order Committee notes that the office of Vice-President has been open to deacons for a significant period of time, that it is nearly always occupied by a lay person, and that previous discussions by the Conference have not led to any change in this position. It does not feel that any further theological reflection by the Committee would help to resolve the different views, nor that it is a theological priority at this time. The Committee is therefore not recommending any change and feels that it is now for the Council and Convocation to decide whether they wish to do so.

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

**13/1. The Council receives the report.**

**13/2. The Council directs the Secretary of the Conference and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order to consider the further steps to be taken in the light of this report, and to report to the next meeting of the Council.**

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<sup>2</sup> *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference* (2011), 3.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference* (2011), 3.7.