

Ministerial Covenant

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Resolution	26/1. The Council receives the report.

1. The following is an update to the brief report presented to the April 2019 meeting of the Council under the title "Ministerial Code of Conduct" (MC/19/55). As noted there, the Conference in 2017 received the report of the Code of Conduct Working Party with the draft of a Ministerial Code of Conduct. The Conference debated the Code in both Sessions and received the Report, commending the draft code for wide consultation across the Connexion. Whilst the Conference set no date by which a revised Code was to be offered to it, the working party asked that responses be received by 30 November 2018
2. 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 Diaconal Order engaged in conversation around the draft Code. During 2017-19 members of the Working Party presented the Code for discussion at a number of Synods.
3. Some members of the working party have now considered the feedback received and propose amendments to the draft code in the light of the comments and their own further reflections.
4. One question that recurred in the responses to the consultation was to whom the Code applied. Does, for example, 'all ministers' include supernumeraries? It is perhaps unavoidable that there should be some ambiguity around this point. Much of the Code refers to the exercise of ministry and it might 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. The group believes that all ministers, in the active work, in circuit or non-circuit appointment, or in retirement would benefit from studying the Code, but that the degree to which it applies to each minister will be proportional to the level of ministry in which each is engaged.
5. A repeated comment in the feedback was about the prescriptive nature of the Code and in particular the section of it dealing with 'Functioning' (the other two dealing with 'Office' and 'Being' respectively). The group now proposes that the material be amended so that in place of a list of things that a minister 'should' do, it is clearly seen to be a series of questions against which a minister can examine her/himself or consider with the help of a supervisor or mentor.
6. Another repeated comment was that the idea of a Code is in itself unbalanced. Whilst not all those who made the point were resistant to there being a code of conduct, it was seen by many as only 'one side of the coin'. Some correspondents asked why there was no parallel code for church members or circuits in their behaviour towards ministers. Others argued that the expectations of ministers in the Code should be balanced by a statement of what ministers could reasonably expect from the Church.
7. The group was persuaded by the force of this argument. It therefore proposes that the final version of what has previously been called the "Code of Conduct"
 - (a) now be entitled the "Ministerial Covenant"; and
 - (b) be incorporated into a larger document including a statement of the Covenant Relationship between the Conference and the minister, and, within it, the expectations that ministers and the rest of the Connexion should have of each other.

8. This will have the effect of integrating the Ministerial Covenant with a separate piece of work that is being undertaken at the behest of the Ministries Committee on ministerial wellbeing. That work in turn is being developed in conscious awareness of parallel projects in other Churches, not least the Church of England's Living Ministry Project (the most recent report of which is entitled *Ministerial Effectiveness and Wellbeing: Exploring the flourishing of clergy and ordinands* and can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Living%20Ministry%20Panel%20survey%20sm.pdf>
9. The group believes that integrating its work in this way will prompt and benefit from a review of the 2008 Conference report on *The Covenant Relationship for those who are Ordained and in Full Connexion* and the subsequent work on a draft *Handbook for Presbyters and Deacons*.
10. The group also believes that integrating its work in this way, together with the fact that its work is grounded in the Ordinal and other foundational documents and consonant with the draft Conference Statement on *Ministry in the Methodist Church* which the 2018 Conference commended for study, discussion and response, adequately meets the concern expressed by one District that the Code should begin with a statement about the theology of the ordained.
11. The group hopes to present its draft material to the March 2020 meeting of the Council, with a view to it being presented to the 2020 Conference.

*****RESOLUTION**

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