

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Task Group

<b>Contact Name and Details</b>	The Revd Michaela A Youngson, Ex-President of the Conference michaela@methodistlondon.org.uk
<b>Resolution</b>	<b>87/1. The Council receives the report.</b>

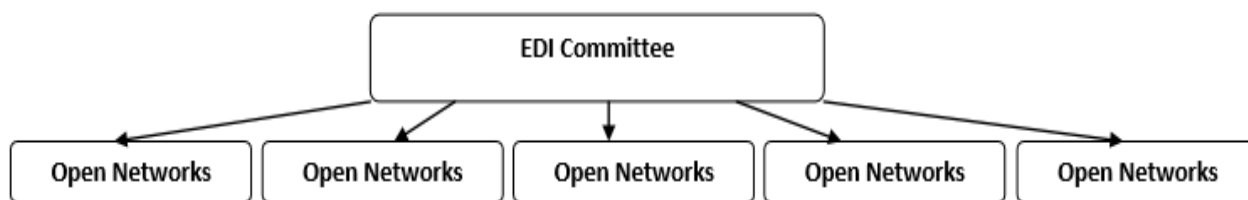
### Introduction and background

1. The Methodist Church has had a long history of being an advocate for social justice and challenging injustice. Work on gender justice was first brought to the Wesleyan Conference in 1928, and the first women presbyters were ordained in 1974, a year before the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Work on racial justice was brought to the Conference in 1962, long before the Government's introduction of the Race Relations Act (1976). These are just a few examples, however, underpinning all this work is our firm belief that all are created in God's image and all are one in Christ Jesus.
2. Following on from those years of work, as a Church we have made significant inroads in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). However, today the issue of race is still a major challenge for the Church, and in becoming an "Inclusive Church" there will need to be a significant transformation, which will include organisational, structural and cultural changes.
3. At the heart of these changes, there must be a recognition that EDI must move beyond being "one of many priorities competing for scarce resources and finance"<sup>1</sup>, to being viewed as an essential and integral part of the Church's life. A way to facilitate this is to embed the themes of EDI across the Connexion.
4. In 2012, the Conference affirmed the following key principles:
  - "The Church should seek to promote Equality and Diversity as an intrinsically Christian response to divine love as evidenced through works of creation, redemption and sanctification.
  - Hospitality is a prime aspect of God's purpose for humanity.
  - Churches should proclaim God's justice for all, through word, deed and life.
  - A key task for the Church is to establish boundaries of our hospitality and ensure that they are not based on constructed human prejudices.
  - The Church to become a community that transforms wider society, challenging all that prevents fullness of life being offered and experienced, not only within the Church but also outside it.
  - We should ensure that the Church is a safe place for all.
5. The Council agreed that the EDI Resource Group take on the leadership, steers the EDI agenda and oversees the development and implementation of the EDI Programme." It was further agreed that "the membership of the EDI Resource Group be supplemented by a District Chair, a member of the Connexional Team Senior Leadership Group, a past President/Vice-President and two members of the Council until further proposals are considered and presented to the Council for the oversight of EDI work."<sup>2</sup>
6. The architecture of the EDI Committee consists of the EDI Committee and open thematic networks as identified in the 2010 'Towards an Inclusive Church' report support it. The themes are based on the priority actions as identified in the April 2013 Council report, 'Towards an Inclusive Church Update

<sup>1</sup> Powell B, Understanding the gap & removing barriers.

<sup>2</sup> Methodist Conference 2012, (Paper 44. Methodist Council Report).

2013'.<sup>3</sup> These themes are vision, architecture and infrastructure, transformation activities, The Connexion and the Connexional Team, mechanisms to achieve these goals.



7. Open Networks were defined as ‘groups of persons with an interest and varying degrees of experience in a particular area that communicate electronically in an ad hoc manner to share information and experience, hold discussion, explore new ideas and provide mutual support. Members of Networks need not be in direct contact with each other.’<sup>4</sup>

### Where we are now

8. Currently, equality, diversity and inclusion is overseen through the EDI Committee, which held its first meeting in 2014. It is mandated to support the work of the Methodist Council in all matters that relate to equality, diversity and inclusion by providing expert resources, advice and guidance. The EDI Committee is responsible for developing understanding and resources that follow EDI themes: age, class and economic justice, disability and impairment, gender, race, sexual orientation.
9. The work of the EDI Committee is focused on developing work and understanding in the following areas:
- Transgender matters and support
  - Gender Justice
  - Racial Justice
  - Preparations for a review on disability and impairment.
10. The 2018 Conference received a report from the Council, which informed the Conference that the EDI Committee proposed to hold a symposium in the connexional year 2018/2019. A progress report (MC/19/44 and 44A) was then presented to the Methodist Council in April 2019. The symposium, entitled “Racial Justice: What is *Our Calling?*” was held on 1-3 March 2019 and there were 80 representatives from across the Connexion. Those who attended the symposium were encouraged to embrace the concepts that address the causes of today’s social, environmental and spiritual challenges. This led to a more creative approach to examining the issues, resulting in the creation of prototypes, which could potentially tackle the barriers to achieving racial justice and ultimately contribute to the Methodist Church’s aspiration of becoming truly inclusive.

### Recommendations

11. The Council received the report and recommended that, “in order to assist the EDI Committee in its work of shaping the Methodist Church to be the inclusive Church we have long committed ourselves to be; the Council agreed to establish a task group to:
- (i) Define the Council’s EDI strategy giving careful attention to all areas of inclusion.
  - (ii) Work closely with the connexional EDI adviser.
  - (iii) Review the composition of the EDI Committee.
  - (iv) Bring an initial report to the next meeting of the Council, and a final report to the Council no later than March 2020.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MC/13/42, Towards an Inclusive Church.

<sup>4</sup> MC/14/51, The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee and Architecture

<sup>5</sup> MC/19/44 and 44a, The Unfinished Agenda.

12. The task group consisted of the then President and Vice-President, the Connexional Secretary and the then Assistant Secretary. The Revd Inderjit Bhogal was invited to join the group but has not been able to attend any of its meetings. The group has met with the EDI Adviser and the Chair of the EDI committee and is grateful for their commitment to the task and the openness with which they have engaged with the process.
13. The task group noted that there can be a lack of clarity about the goal of an EDI strategy although there is a common desire that the Methodist Church become a truly inclusive body. The task group proposes that an inclusive Church be defined as one which:
  1. **Welcomes** all who would come to be part of its life, to share in its worship, and to grow as disciples within its fellowship. An inclusive church is one which makes clear at every point of entry that no-one should feel any less welcome than anyone else on account of their age, social or economic class, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic. The only qualification for entry into and participation in the life of an inclusive Church is a desire (however feeble or feebly expressed) to know more of the love of God.
  2. **Is disciplined in the face of discrimination.** In an inclusive Church, there is no room at all for behaviours which are discriminatory or belittling. Those who share in the life of the Church need to be clear on this point; any transgression of this rule needs to be challenged. Those who act or speak (however subtly) in ways which deny the equality of all people before God or fail to delight in the diversity of the human race should expect there to be consequences for their right to hold office or even membership in the Church.
  3. **Celebrates diversity.** An inclusive Church is one which delights in the variety of God's creation and the catholicity of Christ's Church. It therefore (even when this might not be easy) seeks to incorporate into its worship and other activities the contributions of those of different backgrounds and abilities, to ensure that all can feel that they are included, and that no voice is silenced.
  4. **Represents its diversity throughout its life and structures.** An inclusive Church is one whose public face and leadership reflect the diversity of its membership and wider community. Those who hold power and authority in an inclusive Church are representative of and are constitutionally attentive to the voice of its diverse membership and need to be selected in ways that ensure that. It should go without saying that there is neither place for nor tolerance of discrimination in the Church's processes of selection, discernment and appointment.
14. These goals can only be achieved if consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in the life of the Church in every part. The task group notes the importance of the EDI Toolkit in enabling districts, circuits and churches to consider these issues and to implement practical responses and encourages the EDI Adviser to keep the Toolkit under review and ensure that it has a prominent place in the life of the Church.
15. Given agreement on the four characteristics of an inclusive Church towards which we need to move, the task group has considered whether the current provision through its committee and adviser does or can serve this purpose. It notes the important and effective work that has been done (largely via the learning network) through promoting the Toolkit and training in unconscious bias but questions whether the current structure is the best to move the Church towards the thorough embedding of EDI principles in the life of the Church. It also notes the considerable amount of time given by the EDI Adviser to addressing particular and egregious examples of discriminatory or potentially discriminatory behaviour in the life of the Church but questions whether this moved the focus away from more strategic tasks. The group was also aware of and grateful for the enthusiasm for particular areas of work brought by members of the EDI Committee but noted that this is in some ways a vestige of the architecture that was designed to support and resource the committee when it was established and which no longer exists.

16. The current Chair of the EDI Committee has noted that he has been in post for six years and that this might be an appropriate moment to review the role of the Chair and the make-up of the committee. The task group therefore intends to continue its work and to bring to the Council in 2020 a plan to move towards the four goals indicating:
1. How EDI policies might be produced to move the Church to fulfilling its four goals by ensuring that those who draft policies have the appropriate experience and expertise;
  2. How districts, circuits, and churches might be encouraged (or mandated) to embed those four goals in their life;
  3. How the responsibilities of the EDI Adviser might be clarified in relation to points 1 and 2;
  4. What contribution a connexional committee needs to make to the achievement of points 1 and 2.

**\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**87/1 The Council receives the report.**