

**Our Calling – Developing Vocation**

<b>Contact Name and Details</b>	The Revd Richard Andrew <a href="mailto:richard.andrew@methodist.org.uk">richard.andrew@methodist.org.uk</a> The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler <a href="mailto:hustlerj@methodistchurch.org.uk">hustlerj@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>
<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Discussion and affirmation of main strands of an emerging vocations strategy.
<b>Resolutions</b>	12/1. The Council adopts the report.  12/2. The Council directs the Connexional Team to: (a) begin the implementation of the new work set out in the report (b) make progress reports to the Council as appropriate.  12/3. The Council directs the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider how funding can be made available to support the programmes outlined in this strategy.

**Summary of Content**

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	Vocations strategy
<b>Main Points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction</li> <li>2. Developing Vocation: Support and Accountability Structures</li> <li>3. Work Stream Areas</li> <li>4. Experiencing Ministry</li> <li>5. Strategic Policy Issues</li> <li>6. Financial Issues</li> <li>7. Conclusion</li> </ol>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	Developing Vocations (MC/17/19)
<b>Consultations</b>	The Ministries Committee The Learning Network The staff of the Queen's Foundation

**Summary of Impact**

<b>Standing Orders</b>	Possible if proposals emerge to change the qualifications for candidates in SO 710
<b>Financial</b>	£50,000 to support programmes work
<b>Personnel</b>	Vocations Advisor to be appointed
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	The report recognises that the development of a vocations strategy will require integrated work across every aspect of Connexional life.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	The report builds upon reflection on existing work by the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

## **Our Calling – Developing Vocation**

### **1. Introduction**

This paper explores some practical strategies for implementing a connexional approach to vocations building upon the aspirations set out in the Methodist Council report, *Developing Vocations* (MC/17/19). The proposals do not attempt to set out a theology of vocation but rather identify practical steps and policy areas in which change and adaptation are needed to achieve a 'climate change' in relation to the development of vocations in the Methodist Church. It also identifies areas where work is already taking place or where resources exist which feed into the development of a vocational culture across the life of the Church. A longer version of this paper was received by the Ministries Committee at its meeting in September 2018 and is available to members of the Council should they wish to see more detail on the thinking behind these recommendations (please contact [batesj@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:batesj@methodistchurch.org.uk) if you wish to be sent a copy).

Four key questions provide a short hand description of the direction of vocations, ie towards participation in the *mission of God*.

The four key questions are:

- What is God calling the world to be? *missio Dei*
- What is the (Methodist) Church's part in the mission of God? *Our Calling*
- What enables the Church to play its part in the mission of God? *Ministry*
- How do we enable people to hear a call to their place in that ministry? *Vocations*

The vocations strategy therefore needs to be read and understood in the context of the Faith and Order Committee's report to the Conference, *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (Conference Agenda 2018, pp366-421) and the discussions on the draft statement in part B of that report, and in the light of the renewed emphasis in all parts of the Church on *Our Calling* as our key strategic driver.

### **2. Developing Vocation - Support and Accountability Structures**

Vocation, of its nature, has multiple work focuses. For example, discipleship and vocational formation are closely linked, work with children and young people often has a strong vocational dimension and candidating and selection processes are fundamentally about discernment of particular vocations. Vocational development is also distributed: it involves individual conversation; the work of local churches, circuits and regions; and, particular roles within the Connexional Team amongst other things.

The development of vocation as a core connexional theme requires roles and structures which *focus* and *connect* the work.

#### **2.1 Focusing roles**

This section focuses upon two core, inter-related roles, linking together a role in the Connexional Team and roles supporting district/circuits.

Following changes within the structure of the Connexional Team, a new role of Vocations Advisor is being created as part of the Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team in the Conference Office. This new role will act as a key focus and lead for vocations development across the Connexion. The post has now been advertised twice without an appointment being made; staff in the Conference Office are now looking at the possibility of seconding a member of the Connexional Team to hold the role for an interim period.

If work on vocations is to develop successfully, however, there is also a need to develop roles which act as a focus for vocational exploration on a more local, district or regional basis. The 'lead person' on the vocations strategy might vary between regions, circuits, and districts, and members of the Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team will need to work across the Connexion both to help to identify those people and to resource them. However, it cannot be emphasised enough that key advocates for vocations are those in ministry themselves. It could be argued that every presbyter or deacon should see her or himself as a 'vocations champion'. The role of Chairs, Superintendents, presbyters and deacons is crucial to the development of a culture of vocations at a circuit and district level.

## 2.2 *Connecting Structures*

Two work based structures in particular would help to co-ordinate and connect work areas, reporting as appropriate to the Ministries Committee:

- a) Vocations Development Working Group – with a focus on a co-ordinated approach to vocations development across the Connexional Team. Comprising the Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team (including the Vocations Advisor), representatives of Cliff College and the Queen's Foundation, the Coordinator for Children, Youth and Family, the Youth President, the Coordinator for Discipleship Development, the Director of Evangelism and Growth, the Equality and Diversity Advisor, a representative of the Learning Network, and the Director of Publishing and Communications. An initial meeting of this group has been scheduled for January 2019.
- b) Vocations Community of Practice – a community of practice drawn together once a year from across the connexion supported by the Vocations Advisor drawn from the Development Group, District Vocations Officers or equivalent and wider representation (eg the Chairs' Meeting; HE Chaplaincy; Belonging Together ministers group, the Well Network) for support, strategic reflection and development.

## 3. **Work Stream Areas**

One thing that is particularly striking is the range of discipleship and vocational resources which is already available. At the same time, these are often not widely known and it is not always clear how the different resources relate together. Part of the work is to identify a stronger narrative which connects these resources together and explains to the user, whether a group leader or participant, their role in the exploration of faith and vocation.

Much of the work of this strategy, therefore, will be to link and develop work in five streams:

### 3.1 *Discipleship formation*

In an evolving understanding of *Our Calling* the strategy requires reflection on the meaning of membership for today, its rootedness in baptism and the Eucharist, accountable and performative discipleship, core practices, community (including small groups and classes), covenant, and a rule of life. Existing resources will be examined and, where appropriate, revised and reissued to support this. The Conference discussion document *Reaffirming Our Calling: The Future Call of the Methodist Church* began to tease out how a Methodist Way of Life (paragraphs 16-21) might be interpreted in relation to *Our Calling* and this work will be foundational in a growing culture of vocational awareness.

### 3.2 *Children, schools, youth and family ministry*

Changes to the structure of the Connexional Team mean that the Children, Youth and Family Team now have staff with a Youth and Young Adult Focus. There is a portfolio of existing work across children, schools, youth and family ministry which needs to be connected together with a particular focus on vocation. *3Generate* continues to grow both in numbers and significance and there has been a corresponding growth in the numbers of young people participating in the wider life and structures of the Methodist Church. There is a real opportunity to engage both with the *3Generate* event itself and the year round process by making vocation and the call to ministry an explicit element of the programme.

### 3.3 *Equality and diversity*

The strategy builds on the recommendations in para. 2.3, *Section G (Resourcing Leadership)* of the *Methodist Council (Part 2)* report to the 2016 Conference (*Overcoming Barriers to Participation*). Some work has already begun on issues connected to EDI profiling and a piece of research has begun to look at barriers which affect people offering for various kinds of ministry. There would be benefits in a wider consultation which brought together the Vocations and EDI Advisors, representatives of the Queen's Foundation (which has a long history of work with black majority churches and BAME students), and representatives of the Belonging Together Ministers Group and the Fellowship Groups to look at how BAME vocations (lay and ordained) might be nurtured. Amongst several potential developments, one possibility might be to mirror the experience of the Church of England and develop a Vocations Conference specifically for candidates from a BAME background.

### 3.4 *Communications and advocacy*

Work has been completed on a replacement resource for, *Is God Calling You?*, entitled *Called to Ordination*. The new package of resources includes a pack of 12 full colour standard-size postcards to stimulate reflection on potential calling to ordained ministry, a redesigned website section which offers enquirers fuller information and provides some video 'testimonies' from a representative selection of presbyters and deacons, describing their call, how they live out their ministry, and their particular emphases. The tone is conversational, with a particular accent on attracting younger candidates. The Team is working on systems that ensure this material gets into the hands of those who ought to be challenged to consider a call to ordained ministry.

Both the Church of England and the Church of Scotland have dedicated resources to encouraging vocational discernment with a focused marketing approach within a longer term strategy enabling a consistency of message with a particular focus on under-represented groups. It is clear from the experience of partner churches that the development of a vocations communications strategy is an absolutely key building block for the future.

The Ministries Committee has also been asked to consider:

- a) A Year of Vocations – in order to create some momentum behind vocations, a year of intentional focus on vocations (possibly 2020-21) would be helpful.
- b) The Great Vocations Conversation – paralleling the Church of England initiative (<https://www.churchofengland.org/greatvocationsconversation>) which encourages everyone in ministry (lay and ordained) to have at least one conversation a month about vocation with someone different from themselves. This idea has been advocated through *the connexion* magazine and resources to support conversations will be published on the website.

The Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team is working on the production of resources for Vocations Sundays (and associated material to encourage Methodist people to pray for the call to ministry to

be heard) and on 'Exploring Ordained Ministry' days (which would supplement Vocations Days organised by districts and regions).

A resource is currently being developed as an optional supplement to *Worship: Leading and Preaching* which encourages Local Preachers once they have completed their studies to reflect on 'what next?' and the connections between a ministry of preaching and a consideration of ordained ministry.

### 3.5 Research

Two discrete research tasks are now being undertaken with a particular focus on numbers candidating for ordained ministry:

- a) The data system supporting candidating has evolved in recent years and provides information which feeds into the Conference report on numbers of candidates. A piece of work is underway which focuses on developing the current system and drawing down existing data, insofar as that is possible, with particular emphasis on age, gender and ethnicity profiles and break down by district.
- b) A study is being undertaken by the Revd Dr Philip Richter looking at obstacles to candidating. The aim of the study is to look at how ordained ministry and the processes of candidating and training are perceived by potential candidates.

## 4. Experiencing Ministry

One of the challenges is to try to find ways for those who might consider a call to ordained ministry to experience what answering that call might entail. There are two possible and complementary ways of addressing this need:

- a) *Encounter - Encounter* was a connexional resource first developed by York Institute for Community Theology and the Yorkshire Districts as a response to the 2006 Conference report 'Extending Discipleship, Exploring Vocation' (EDEV). The current version is available at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning/discipleship/journeying-with-others/small-groups/resourcing-your-small-group/encounter>. *Encounter* is followed in a small group of up to 12 people, led by Encounter Facilitators, who meet approximately once a month to consider various themes relating to discipleship and vocation. *Encounter* is particularly aimed at people wanting to explore or deepen a call into ministry, lay or ordained and might profitably be refocused as a ministry experience programme.
- b) Ministry Experience Scheme – there is a real opportunity to take advantage of the opportunities created by the Apprenticeship Levy and the new apprenticeship standard for ministry to leverage in new funding and to work with both the Queen's Foundation and Cliff College to create different versions of a ministry experience scheme, creating opportunities for paid, lay, apprenticeship opportunities in local churches and circuits supported through a shared journey with a formational community. Whilst there will need to be opportunities for all, there are particular opportunities which could be explored connected to the vocations of young people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## 5. Strategic Policy Issues

The developments outlined above have been developed within the Church's current policies. There are a number of issues which will demand attention from the Ministries Committee and the Council (and possibly the Stationing and Faith and Order Committees) in future, including:

- a) The current qualifications for candidating under SO 710.

- b) The perennial set of issues (addressed in part in *Ministry in the Methodist Church*) concerning itinerancy and various forms of localised, pioneering and contextual ministries which clearly are having an impact, thus far unquantifiable, upon candidating numbers.
- c) Whether there are issues of finance (bursary, stipend, and pension) that might be a factor in deterring candidates.
- d) The continuing vocation of presbyters and deacons to life-long ministry which might lead to flexible routes into retirement.
- e) The need to take a strategic approach towards the creation of future generations of theological educators.
- f) The capacity that needs to be maintained at the Queen's Foundation if and when the number of those entering initial training increases.
- g) The increase in the numbers of those exercising significant authorised lay ministry in the life of the Church and some reflection on what the Church and its ministry will look like in ten or twenty years' time.

## 6. Financial Issues

It is evident from the above that a vocations strategy will require a cross cluster and whole church approach and this will have a financial impact across a number of different areas of work. It is difficult to assess precisely what this means in financial terms as some costs can be absorbed into existing budgets. There will need to be some discussion though about increased budget provision for vocations especially for the *Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team* which will have a key role in co-ordinating this work. In the short term (ie 2019-20 and 2020-21), it would be sensible to allocate a programmes budget of at least £50,000 p.a. (held by the Conference Office) but available for cross-cluster work, but the range of opportunities that are available suggests that this is work that would benefit from a more considerable investment.

## 7. Conclusion

The development of work on vocations is urgent. Discussion of a vocations strategy needs to allow sufficient space for evolution of the strategy as a whole whilst having confidence in the Connexional Team and other key partners to begin progressing some of these proposals immediately without delay. Some of the wider strategic issues may require a different way of working (for example, a commission) in order to progress them more quickly and the process for pursuing these issues would be worth further discussion by the Methodist Council.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**12/1. The Council adopts the report.**

**12/2. The Council directs the Connexional Team to:**

- (c) begin the implementation of the new work set out in the report**
- (d) make progress reports to the Council as appropriate.**

**12/3. The Council directs the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider how funding can be made available to support the programmes outlined in this strategy.**