

The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) as a Religious Order

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Resolutions	24/1. The Council receives the Report. 24/2. The Council agrees the proposed way forward set out in paragraph 3.3.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	To bring the Methodist Council up to date with the work on the MDO as a religious order and to agree the process for reporting to the 2019 Conference.
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1. Introduction

1.1. The 2016 Conference received an interim report on *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate*, which advocated “the need for further clarity to be brought as to the nature of the MDO as a religious order in the British Methodist Church” (para. 6.5). In response the Conference agreed the following resolutions:

33/2. The Conference directed the Methodist Council, with the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Faith and Order Committee, to consider whether the religious order should be opened to receive into membership Methodists who are lay or ordained to presbyteral ministry and report to the 2018 Conference.

33/3. The Conference directed the Methodist Council, with the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Faith and Order Committee, to consider whether those whom it ordains to the diaconal order of ministry continue to be required also to become members of the religious order and report to the 2018 Conference.

1.2. In order to address these significant and complex questions, the Council appointed a small group to consider these Resolutions and take forward this work (see paper MC/16/92).

2. The findings of the group

2.1. Having considered the resolutions and consulted with the MDO, including through Convocation and regional days, the group reached the following conclusions:

- a. That deacons in the Methodist Church in Britain should continue to belong to both an order of ministry and a religious order. For many deacons the order of ministry and the religious order are seen as essentially intertwined. This is further reflected in many areas of the Church’s polity and practice. There is no clear and pastorally justifiable reason for separating the order of ministry and the religious order, and it was found that there is generally either resistance or a lack of will and energy for such a course of action.
- b. That there was not found to be a strong interest or clear reason to open up the MDO to presbyters and lay people. More recent and renewed interest in religious orders, or in belonging to some form of religious community, has not led to much particular interest in

admission to the MDO itself.

2.2. The group therefore recommends that the Conference is asked to reaffirm that the MDO is a religious order open only to those who are ordained deacons in Full Connexion with the Methodist Conference; and that all ordained deacons in the Methodist Church in Britain are also required to be members of the MDO.

3. The report to the 2019 Conference

3.1. The conclusions reached by the group raise some questions of ecclesiology and polity (some of which are long-standing), and relate to the ongoing work of the Faith and Order Committee on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate. In May and November 2018 the Secretary of the Conference therefore convened two meetings to discuss the relevant work of both the Faith and Order Committee and the Methodist Council group. These meetings agreed that it would be sensible and helpful to bring together the different pieces of work on the diaconate and the MDO into one report. Such a report would set out the fundamental theological and ecclesiological thinking and then seek to address the variety of oversight (and other related) questions which arise or have persisted over many years. Subject to the agreement of the Methodist Council, this report would be brought to the 2019 Conference by the Faith and Order Committee.

3.2. As part of its continuing work in this area, the Faith and Order Committee will be consulting with MDO Area Groups and with the Ministries Committee on aspects of this work before it meets again at the beginning of March.

3.3. It is therefore proposed that the response to resolutions 33/2 and 33/3 from the 2016 Conference is contained within the Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2019 Conference on the Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate. The Faith and Order Committee will report the contents of its report to the Methodist Council in April 2019.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

24/1. The Council receives the report.

24/2. The Council agrees the proposed way forward set out in paragraph 3.3.