

**‘The Unfinished Agenda’ – Progress report**

<b>Contact Name and Details</b>	The Revd Stephen Poxon, Chair of the EDI Committee
<b>Status of Paper</b>	Progress report
<b>Resolution</b>	47/1. The Council receives the report.

**Summary of Content**

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	To provide a report on progress on ‘The Unfinished Agenda’ in accordance with Resolution 27/9(b) of the 2017 Conference
<b>Main Points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Background</li> <li>2. Progress</li> <li>3. Key questions</li> <li>4. Proposals</li> </ol>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	Section N of the <i>Methodist Council, part 2</i> report to the 2017 Conference (plus further background documents identified in this report) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Toolkit Module 6 (Race)
<b>Consultations</b>	EDI Committee Members of the Belonging Together Ministers’ Group

**Summary of Impact**

<b>Financial</b>	Likely – however, it is anticipated that the costs of the proposed symposium will be offset by underspend on the vacant EDI Adviser post
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	Likely – Resolution 27/9(b) (2017) aims to increase participation and inclusion across the Connexion

## ‘The Unfinished Agenda’ – Progress report

### 1.0 Background

1.1 The 2017 Conference received a report from the Council on ‘The Unfinished Agenda – Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church’ (see Section N of the *Methodist Council, part 2* report).<sup>1</sup> While commending the Methodist Church’s long-standing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and examples of current good practice, the report noted with deep shame and sorrow that racism is still evident in the Church today. It explored a number of recurring themes over the past 50 years (belonging and exclusion, assimilation, inclusive leadership and participation and tokenism) and demonstrated that significant work is still required in order to give expression to the Church’s belief that ‘racism is a denial of the gospel’ (Standing Order 013B).

1.2 The report noted that many of the issues considered with regard to racism resonate with other areas of equality and diversity. Its recommendations focused on four areas:

- initiating a conversation around a shared model of an inclusive Methodist Church;
- presenting the challenges concerning the current statistical picture relating to the age, disability, ethnic and the sex composition of the membership of the Methodist Church and its leadership;
- ensuring that all possible steps are taken so that the leadership, personnel and ways of being and working of the Conference and all connexional committees and oversight bodies reflect the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion;
- affirming a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential senior leaders of the Church (Section 3.1).

1.3 The 2017 Conference received the report and agreed the following resolutions:

27/7. The Conference, in confessing the sin of racism and seeking to repent of that sin, recognised the considerable amount of work still required of the whole Connexion in order to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusion.

27/8. The Conference urged Districts, Circuits, Local Churches and appropriate connexional bodies to engage with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit.

27/9. The Conference:

(a) as a matter of urgency, committed itself to taking steps to enable the Methodist Church to become a more inclusive and multicultural community of faith;

(b) therefore directeds the Methodist Council to request the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee to consult with the Belonging Together Ministers’ Group, the Fellowships Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee and the World Church Relationships office in order to develop and implement measurable and time bound plans that will increase participation and inclusion, and to report to the Conference of 2018 on how the plans are progressing.

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<sup>1</sup> References in this paper are to Section N of the *Methodist Council, part 2* report to the 2017 Conference unless otherwise stated.

## 2.0 Progress

- 2.1 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee has met and reflected on the resolutions above and particularly the direction given through Resolution 27/9(b). Unfortunately, progress has been slower than the Committee had originally hoped, as the post of EDI Adviser has remained vacant for a number of months (this was due to a number of staff changes in the Team accompanied by a desire to ensure that the role had been reflected on properly before advertising took place). The Committee is, however, grateful to the Revd Ermal Kirby and a number of members of the Belonging Together Ministers' Group for sharing with the Committee's residential meeting in February a series of reflections on the theme of 'An Inclusive and Multicultural Community of Faith.' Some of these reflections and the responses of the EDI Committee are as follows:
- 2.1.1 The Methodist Church, at every level of its common life, seeks answers to the question: 'What is the state of the work of God?'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important to consider what we might reasonably believe to be God's design in bringing together in the Methodist Church in Britain today preachers and members of such diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- 2.1.2 In light of this, how might the policies and practices of the Church best reflect the diversity of people involved in the work of God in the Methodist Church? The EDI Committee noted that this was at the heart of all the work it seeks to do on behalf of the Council.
- 2.1.3 Further conversations around inclusive leadership and participation (see Section 2.4) have highlighted the question of what might prevent people from diverse backgrounds from exercising leadership through engagement with the Church's committees and governance structures (eg methods of recruitment and selection, expectations of conformity with established practice, or the location and timing of meetings). In addition to encouraging connexional bodies to engage with the EDI toolkit (Resolution 27/8), this question must be addressed in order to ensure that all possible steps are taken so that the leadership, personnel and ways of being and working of the Conference and all connexional committees and oversight bodies reflect the Church's commitment to EDI (Section 3.1). The EDI Committee wishes to avoid an audit process that could prove onerous and hinder the work of connexional bodies; however, it suggests that committees and groups should be encouraged to self-audit using the EDI Toolkit in order to determine whether their composition reflects the Church's vision of an inclusive and multicultural community of faith and, if not, to take steps to address this.
- 2.1.4 The Committee wishes to encourage work that is already underway to ensure that the Methodist Church continues to be enriched by sustained engagement with contextual theologies from a variety of cultures. It notes, for example, that the 2018 candidating portfolio required candidates to read and reflect on C S Song's *Tracing the Footsteps of God*. It notes also opportunities for transformative encounters and creative learning facilitated by The Queen's Foundation, such as the Mutual Exchange and Encounter for Transformation (MEET) Programme. Continuing conversation with the Ministries Committee will be vital in encouraging further development and building on current good practice.
- 2.1.5 Given the rate of change with regard to the cultural composition of the Methodist Church (and British contexts more widely), it is vital that the Church engages with children and young people on issues of identity, culture and faith. The Committee wishes to commend the excellent work of 3Generate and particularly the Shaper Groups that seek to involve young people from a wide variety of backgrounds in leadership and programme

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<sup>2</sup> eg Standing Orders 488(8) and 561(ii).

development. A wider question for the Council and 3Generate is how might the wider Church learn from this good practice.

2.2 The Committee is aware that these questions need to be addressed in dialogue with other areas of ongoing work, such as:

- Work to develop a connexional vocations and ministry strategy, leading to growth in the number, variety and breath of vocations allowing for a coherent and connexional approach to developing patterns of ministry for the whole people of God (see MC/18/1).
- Work arising from the recommendations of the Larger than Circuit Coordinating Group, and especially plans to develop a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential candidates for appointment as a District Chair, bearing in mind the need to increase gender and ethnic diversity among the District Chairs (see MC/17/11). This work will be amongst the priorities for the new EDI Adviser as they start.

2.3 The Committee also noted helpful resources produced by other churches and conferences, such as the United Methodist Church's General Commission on Religion and Race (particularly excellent resources like 'Vital Conversations' see [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org)).

### 3.0 **Key questions**

3.1 The committee's reflections led to the distillation of a number of key questions for consideration in a wider context, including:

- 3.1.1 What might we reasonably believe to be God's design in bringing together in the Methodist Church in Britain today preachers and members of such diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds?
- 3.1.2 What might prevent people from diverse backgrounds from exercising leadership through engagement with the Church's committees and governance structures?
- 3.1.3 What can be learned from examples of good practice in the life of the Church with regard to inclusion and participation (eg 3Generate)?

### 4.0 **Proposals**

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that a symposium is held in the 2018/19 connexional year to consider the key questions outlined above. This symposium should include representation from the Belonging Together Ministers' Group, the Fellowships Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee, and 3Generate.
- 4.2 Details of the proposed symposium will be reported to the Council in October 2018. A report from the symposium (and any resulting proposals to increase participation and inclusion within the life of the Methodist Church) may be brought to a subsequent meeting of the Council.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**47/1. The Council receives the report.**