

## Report of the Working Group on 'Fellowship Groups'

<b>Contact Name and Details</b>	The Revd Dr Martyn D Atkins, Secretary of the Conference and General Secretary <a href="mailto:atkinsm@methodistchurch.org.uk">atkinsm@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>
<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Discussion
<b>Draft Resolution</b>	46/1. The Council receives the report.  46/2 The Council affirms the recommendations set out in the report, commends them to the Conference and proposes that further work as indicated in the report is overseen by the One Mission Forum.  46/3 The Council directs the Secretary of the Conference to oversee consideration of the recommendations in paragraph 7.2 of the report.

### Summary of Content

<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task given to the Fellowships Working Group</li> <li>• General Themes</li> <li>• Practical Implications</li> <li>• Proposed recommendations for the Conference</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	The General Secretary's report to the 2014 Conference
<b>Consultations</b>	Fellowship Groups, World Church Relationships staff, Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network staff

### Summary of Impact

<b>Wider Connexional</b>	Work aims at greater integration of Fellowship Groups across the Connexion.
--------------------------	---

## Report of the Working Group on 'Fellowship Groups'

### The task and the group

1. The General Secretary's report to the 2014 Conference directed that a working group be set up to carry out work on the subject of *"the growing number of language and/or ethnically configured Methodist congregations and fellowships now found in very many parts of our Connexion"* and to make an interim report to the Council before making any proposals to the Conference. *The group has reflected on three areas:*
  - **Relationships** - are already strong in some areas and are developing. Some members of the group were concerned that the deepening of relationships should be in terms of spirituality as well as in terms of human relationships within and between churches.
  - **Partnerships** - it was recognised that British Methodism is good at holding a number of existing partnerships, and these formed the subject of much of the discussion. The strengthening of mutual witnessing was mentioned in relation to partnerships.
  - **Integration** - this is relevant at many areas of the life of churches, including leadership. In some cultures, congregations would follow leaders so that when leaders have developed integration, it was felt that church members would follow this lead.
  
2. A number of documents were circulated which contributed to the group's work:
  - The General Secretary's report to the 2014 Conference;
  - Notes from the Fellowships Day Conference 25 November 2014;
  - The 'Belonging Together' project report;
  - Report by Lia Shimada 'Diverse Ministries in the Methodist Church';
  - Report on statistics by Hamish Leese 2013-2014 'Belonging Together – Findings of research with Fellowship Groups';
  - Introductory briefing paper for the working group.
  
3. Members of the working group were:
 

• The Revd Dr Martyn D Atkins	General Secretary/Secretary of the Conference
• The Revd William Davis	Ghanaian Methodist Fellowship
• The Revd Edson Dube	Zimbabwean Methodist Fellowship
• Mr John Hicks QC	Law and Polity Committee
• The Revd Nicholas A Oborski	Superintendent with oversight of Chinese speaking congregation
• The Revd Dr Ayodeji E Okegbile	Nigerian Methodist Fellowship
• The Revd Dr Claire R Potter	Superintendent minister
• Sister Eluned Williams	Synod Cymru/Wales Synod
• Jenny Yeung	Birmingham Chinese Methodist Church (added after the Methodist Council approved the membership)

#### Non-voting advisers:

Ms Jennifer Crook, Equality and Diversity Adviser, the Connexional Team

Mr David Friswell, World Church Relationships Team Leader, the Connexional Team

The Revd John A Squares, Development Officer, North West and Mann Region, Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network, specialism in discipleship.

4. In addition to a day Conference in November 2014 the group has met on two occasions.

### General themes

5. The group identified five key themes:
- 5.1 Affirmation that all groups want to be Methodist and connected – there is **One Mission** (integration without assimilation).
- 5.2 Increasing numbers of Methodists from around the world are part of the Methodist Church in Britain. What impact should this have on the Church's structures in Britain? How are we to be a **flexible and faithful** Methodist Church in Britain today?
- 5.3 The role and help of Fellowship Groups in reclaiming and embodying **Methodist identity** in the British Methodist Church today.
- 5.4 The recognition that Fellowship Groups are in **different places** in terms of their (current) needs, intentions, size, organisation and expectations.
- 5.5 The importance of healthily **connecting** everyone belonging to a worldwide Methodist movement through a single connexional Methodist Church in Britain.

### Practical implications arising from these themes

6. A number of practical implications associated with each of the themes listed above were also identified:

#### 6.1 One Mission

- There is no deep intent or desire among Fellowship Groups to establish another Methodist Church in Britain – we are one. Hence there is no desire to develop non-geographical circuits. There is though a desire for the British Methodist Church and Fellowship Groups to be flexible and humble enough to change as the context changes.
- We need to learn from other parts of the world where 'One Church, One Mission' is working.

#### 6.2 Flexible and faithful

- Structures need to be considered so as to include people from Methodist Churches around the world better – for example:
  - Representation at the annual Conference and district synods. The group considered the issue of representation carefully and consequently suggests that a) consideration be given to whether an agreed number of representatives of 'fellowship groups' should be representatives to the Conference, as a temporary measure, and b) that both ministers and members associated with Fellowship groups seek, and be strongly encouraged to seek, election to the annual Conference and district synods, through the normal processes which, in order to be eligible, require ministers to be stationed in the district concerned, and lay people to hold Methodist membership within the district concerned. The group became aware of the significance of current leaders in Fellowship Groups taking a lead, enabling others to follow.

- Candidating – it is important to encourage development of leaders from Fellowship Groups and find apt contexts in which the call of God to ordained ministries might be discerned.
- Stationing matching –while stationing matching often works well in terms of linking language, cultural identity and gifts with needs, this needs reinforcing and encouraging. There is no desire to create an alternative process for Fellowship Groups while being mindful that care and thought are needed to increase the level of healthy integration and enriching of the Connexion, together with the sensible and sensitive matching of ministers to particular language and cultural groupings and congregations.

### 6.3 Methodist identity

- Renewing an understanding of commitment to the Methodist tradition (Fellowship Groups as ‘Agents of Renewal’) – helping the relearning of Methodist history and theology. It needs to **be recognised that** the Methodist Church in different countries has developed Methodism in different ways. Some are enormously healthy and encouraging and greater intent, energy and flexibility is required of us all to embrace a wider normative expression of Godly Methodism. Equally, not all will be appropriate to ‘reclaim’ in a contemporary British context. There are also differing understandings of ecumenism among Methodists from different parts of the world. How to learn, discern and change for good is an area needing further exploration.
- Vibrant worship and openness to the communication of God’s Spirit through the many voices in the Methodist Church in Britain.
- Fellowship Groups are ‘in between’ grass roots and the Connexion, which could help integration.

### 6.4 Different places

- Integration is preferred to co-existence. Guidelines on healthy integration are needed at connexional level so that structures are in place when Methodists arrive in Britain. These need to recognise the different histories, patterns and models of Fellowship Groups and chaplaincies.
- An advisory or support group is needed at connexional level.
  - This group is to guide Fellowship Groups into fuller integration and to encourage members of Fellowship Groups to become members of the Methodist Church.
  - This may only need to be a temporary group and will work alongside existing structures.
  - This group needs to communicate across difference and to include representation from all Fellowship Groups and smaller groups which are not (yet) formally Fellowship Groups.
  - The group could send an agreed number of representatives to the Conference as a temporary measure until members of Fellowship Groups are more integrated into districts and can then be nominated through the usual processes.
  - It is important to consider how all this relates to the work of the One Mission Forum, and where it is ‘located’ in terms of accountability etc.
  - This group would be similar in providing support for Fellowship Groups as the Superintendents’ conference does for Superintendents.
- Language is a major issue for some groups and less so for others. Inclusion is vital even if translation inevitably makes services and meetings longer.
- Funding is running out for some chaplaincies. The model of half time in circuit and half time as chaplain works well, but it was noted that where the 50% Connexional funding comes from is not always yet determined. Further discussion is needed and the group

is aware that helpful conversations are under way with members of the Connexional Grants Committee.

## 6.5 Connecting

- Methodist identity is seen as more important than cultural identity, yet *cultural* links are often the first people look for when arriving in Britain. Fellowship Groups help greatly diverse people connect with their Methodist identity.
- The Methodist Church in Britain needs to recognise that people arrive in Britain for many different reasons (eg economic, family, displacement, temporary, permanent). These have a differing impact on people's connections with churches. The Methodist Church and Fellowship Groups need to be aware of these different contexts and engage more intelligently and sensitively with them.
- Orientation is vital – particularly for ministers arriving into the British Methodist Church. However orientation must be 'two way'. Roles may have the same name in different parts of the world church yet there are very different expectations attached to them. Both ministers and churches need better awareness of this. Gifts and previous training need to be recognised better and barriers overcome (eg language). The whole subject of orientation requires continuing careful thought, and the group is encouraged that such work is intended to be undertaken by appropriate bodies and urges that insights arising from the Fellowship Groups be included in this developing work.
- A greater 'permissiveness' was discerned to be needed, and, rightly or wrongly, the group heard how rules and process in the Methodist Church in Britain sometimes appear inflexible and unduly restrictive in relation to the experience of Methodism in other parts of the world.
- The need to provide more points of connection with the work of the World Church Team and others so that the global nature of the Methodist church is more deeply visible and embedded throughout the connexion. The group is encouraged to hear of a 'vision' paper for the future of World Church activity, and urges that insights from this group be fed into that process of renewing vision and focus.
- Other models of leadership than 'chaplaincy' were considered to see if a better model could be found. The group concluded that, at least for the foreseeable near future, the current model was appropriate and generally effective, while recognising that Fellowship Group chaplaincies are significantly different from others (eg hospital, prison, industrial, forces and university chaplaincies, which all tend, to a greater degree, to have the chaplain relating to largely 'secular' institutions or organisations).

## 7. Recommendations

Having considered the themes and implications that arose, the group now propose to bring recommendations to the Conference which aim to bring about deeper relationships, mutual partnerships and genuine integration of Fellowship Groups with the Connexion of which they are part. The recommendations are listed below, and the Council is invited to offer its views on what is proposed:

- 7.1 Set up a connexional advisory/support group for Fellowship groups. The group to comprise a representative of each Fellowship Group and some smaller groups. The role of the group is

to support Fellowship Groups, share good practice, guide them into full integration and encourage members to become full members of the Methodist Church. The group would also act as an advisory group for the Methodist Church, particularly in relation to encouraging vocation and providing orientation for ministers, leaders and churches.

- 7.2 Consider whether an agreed number of representatives of 'fellowship groups' should be representatives to the Conference as a temporary measure. (The group is aware of the sensitivity of this recommendation, and the careful way in which the current size and construction of the Conference is determined. It believes however that the Council should have opportunity to comment and reflect on this recommendation.)
- 7.3 Involve Fellowship Group input to planning *3Generate*.
- 7.4 Ensure differing needs of Fellowship Groups are fed into the new modules of the new local preacher and worship leader training.
- 7.5 Develop connexional guidelines on 'healthy integration'
- 7.6 Address and clarify the issue of funding for chaplaincies.
- 7.7 Continue to provide orientation for ministers from other countries who are coming into the British stations, and expand it to include: ministers who come through different routes, church members, preachers and church communities. The new advisory/support group can assist in developing this and connecting with an appropriate 'reclaiming' of Methodist heritage.

## 8. **Conclusion**

If the Council and/or the Conference approve all or any of the recommendations found here clearly further work is needed to be undertaken. Some work can be annexed onto work already been undertaken by others, other work cannot. The suggestion of the group is that an overview of the work recommended in this report is held in the future by the One Mission Forum which, at least in the first instance, is also responsible for the formation and accountability of the proposed Advisory Support Group.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**46/1. The Council receives the report.**

**46/2. The Council affirms the recommendations set out in the report, commends them to the Conference and proposes that further work as indicated in the report is overseen by the One Mission Forum.**

**46/3. The Council directs the Secretary of the Conference to oversee consideration of the recommendations in paragraph 7.2 of the report.**