

16. Methodist Forces Board

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Robert Jones – Secretary for the Methodist Forces Board. jonesr@methodistchurch.org.uk
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1. This has been a year of some significant changes in the deployment of the three Services with the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The last two chaplains deployed at Kandahar airport were Methodists. The Revd Crispian Acher's audiovisual account of his own time in Afghanistan, shown at last year's Conference is now available on the Chaplaincy pages of the Methodist Church website. The draw-down from Germany continues and presents some considerable challenges both in Germany and at home. The end of formal engagement in Afghanistan does not mean that the pace of military life slackens very much. There is still a considerable military presence in the Gulf responding to the threat of ISIS and there are small pockets of engagement in a large number of places in Africa, most of which need chaplaincy support from time to time. Since March, one of our Methodist Chaplains, Darren Middleton, has deployed to Sierra Leone as part of the British response to the Ebola crisis and will still be there when the Conference meets.
2. Our complement of chaplains has remained stable (Total 28 chaplains - 7 Royal Navy, 12 Army, 9 Royal Air Force). Since the last Conference, we have seen only one chaplain leave Forces Chaplaincy. Melanie Reed left the RAF for circuit ministry. During the same period Alastair Bissell, who formally retired from the RAF a year ago, has begun a period of service as a full-time reservist.
3. The Secretary and the Chair were again privileged to accompany the President on the annual visit to the Forces which this year was to the Army. The Revd Kenneth Howcroft was welcomed to Army Headquarters at Andover where the Chaplain General provided a full briefing of the current position of the Army and in particular of Royal Army Chaplains Department. In the evening, the Chaplain General held a dinner in the President's honour. During this visit, the President visited the King's Royal Hussars at Tidworth Garrison, the Defence Academy Chaplaincy Training Centre at Amport House and the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. We were also glad to welcome the President to the Methodist Tri-Service Forces Chaplains Conference at Amport House in February. We were also joined for this conference by the Revd Dr Philip Luscombe who explored contemporary issues of faith and science and the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins who led a challenging session on 'mission'. Also present throughout this conference, as every year, was the Revd Dr Andrew Wood who is the Chair of District with responsibility for Chaplains as they leave the Forces. Along with Doug Swanney and Jude Levermore, Andrew Wood led a session on current issues facing the Methodist Church.
4. The Forces Board wishes to thank the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust for its excellent financial support. It is this provision that has allowed the Board to continue to fund a range of projects including a children and youth work project within the Aldershot garrison town and remarkably supported by North Camp Methodist Church. Also we sustain a full-time pastoral worker with the Haven Project at HMS Sultan in Gosport and a half-time pastoral worker to support the chaplaincy at the Tri-Service Permanent Joint Head Quarters (PJHQ) in Northwood which fits well with our portfolio of activities. For much of this year we have offered through grant aid, support for a part-time children's worker attached to the chaplaincy team at Bergen-Hohne Garrison as it prepares for withdrawal at the end of the summer. As a new development, we have just recruited a new full-time children and youth worker to work with the two congregations (Catholic and Protestant) at St Alban's MOD Church linked to the Chaplaincy at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham.

5. The Board continues to offer a number of small grants to Chaplains for activities within the Forces communities. One such grant was used to support the 'Making Relationships Stronger' course being run at RAF Coningsby. A small sum of money enabled this course to be offered free of charge to all participants.
6. We were particularly glad last year to welcome to the Conference the Chaplain of the Fleet (RN), the Chaplain General (Army), and the Deputy Chaplain in Chief (RAF) – who have demonstrated their support and appreciation for the Methodist contribution to chaplaincy in the three services in many ways throughout their respective tenures.
7. We welcome at this time three new heads of chaplaincy and convey to them our thanks for their support and our encouragement as they grapple with the very big issues that they face. Significant among these issues is the recruitment of a very large number of reservists that all three services need and in consequence the reserve chaplains that are needed to support this new personnel cohort.
8. The Board would wish to extend to the Conference its thanks for the prayerful support given to all our Chaplains and encourage anyone who would like to know more about Forces Chaplaincy to speak to members of the Board.
9. The Board is grateful for the ongoing diligence and commitment of its Secretary to the ministries of the Chaplains and the Board.
10. Members of the Methodist Forces Board for 2015/16 will be: the Revds David J Barrett, Janice A Morgan, Robert L Jones (convener), Jean A Quick, Mr Ian Davies, Mr Peter Green, Col. Philip Harrison, Miss Shirley Hewitt, Ms Jude Levermore, Mrs Liesel Parkinson, Mr Doug Swanney (Chair), Lt Cdr (ret'd) Matthew Thomas.

*****RESOLUTION**

16/1. The Conference received the Report.