

## 29. Methodist Diaconal Order General Report

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1. The total membership of the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) is 279. This figure can be broken down thus:  
117 active deacons  
27 probationer deacons  
120 supernumerary deacons  
15 student deacons

In addition, the Order is augmented by one Authorised Deacon, one Associate Deacon (supernumerary), 29 associate members and a number of 'Friends of the Order'.

### 2. MDO centre Relocation

The dominant feature on the Order's landscape for much of this and the last connexional year has been the relocation of the MDO centre from 26 St James Road Birmingham to Methodist Church House (MCH), London. Unfortunately, the move has not been without its difficulties or challenges; including a burglary at the MDO centre just prior to leaving Birmingham and the need for necessary building works in MCH. The building works have resulted in the re-creation of the MDO Centre within MCH being postponed. Understandably this has added some anxiety and distress to the Order's wellbeing. Yet the vision and commitment to the re-creation of a new MDO centre as a hospitable, praying presence and the contribution it might make to MCH remains strong. We look forward to inhabiting our new space at MCH in the early months of the new connexional year.

### 3. The Leadership Group

The Methodist Council has considered various issues related to the MDO in recent years, and made a number of recommendations to the 2014 Methodist Conference. Two significant recommendations were the appointment of a full-time Deputy Warden and the setting up of the MDO Leadership Group. These were agreed by the Conference, together with the proposed list of members for the group: Mrs Ruth Pickles (Past Vice-President) as Chair, Deacons Eunice Attwood and Ian Murray, the Revds Richard Andrew and Sharon Willimott, Dr Malcolm Stevenson and Ms Tamara Wray, the Warden and Deputy Warden in attendance.

The group has met three times and has four main responsibilities: oversight, accountability, support and advocacy; it is exploring how these may best be exercised for the benefit of the Order. Additionally a subgroup was convened specifically to consider the distinctive, but collaborative, role descriptions for Warden and Deputy Warden. The Revds Peter Barber and Richard Clutterbuck were invited to contribute to this sub-group.

### 4. Stationing Matching

The process of identifying diaconal appointments continued to be a pressure this year. It had been anticipated that the process for matching of deacons would finally be merged with the process for presbyters this connexional year and protocols were drawn up by the Stationing Committee to assist in that endeavour. However, it became clear that this was not possible if we were to respond to the lack of available diaconal appointments; but needed to be as flexible as possible. Overall, the number of ministers needed across both orders of ministry was roughly equivalent to the number of ministers available to fill those appointments this year. However, a closer look at the situation for each individual order revealed a somewhat

different story, with the number of presbyteral appointments in excess of the numbers of available presbyters and too few appointments for deacons. Inevitably, this meant that a number of presbyteral appointments were reshaped into diaconal appointments and made available for those deacons still to be stationed, which is an unsatisfactory situation.

Some Circuits report that they have the need for a deacon but not the resources to support an appointment; others do not recognise a need for a deacon and occasionally Circuits may feel pressured into creating appointments because they have the resources. Some Circuits already struggle to fill their existing presbyteral vacancies. For some Circuits to divert resources into a diaconal appointment stretches already overstretched resources even further.

Alongside the response of Circuits is the Order's response, both as a community and as individual members, to itinerancy and direct stationing; to issues around engagement in and commitment toward our ongoing development as ministers; honest reflection about our strengths and weaknesses and how we deal with issues of incompetency; the tension between what each of us wants to do and what the Circuits are asking of us.

#### **5. Priorities for the next Connexional Year**

Some of the priorities for the coming year will need to be:

- the ongoing development of the internal life of the Order and its members and the recreation of MDO centre in MCH;
- engagement with the Faith and Order Committee in regard to its work on the theology and ecclesiology of the diaconate;
- continuing to address the issues raised around diaconal stationing, in order to establish, create and sustain diaconal appointments;
- the Leadership Group and its areas of responsibility paying particular attention to advocacy.

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

**29/1. The Conference received the Report.**

**29/2. The Conference resolved that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at the Hayes Conference Centre from Tuesday 3 May until Friday 6 May 2016.**