

40. Positive Working Together

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	For decision
Draft Resolutions	<p>40/1. The Conference receives the Report.</p> <p>40/2. The Conference directs that the <i>Guidelines for promoting good working relationships and managing conflict within the Church</i> be promoted in appropriate ways.</p> <p>40/3. The Conference directs that each District appoints a suitable person to provide information but not advice about the options available to an individual experiencing bullying and harassment issues.</p> <p>40/4. The Conference directs each District to ensure that its District Reconciliation Group receives annual training and appropriate support, so that it is equipped to deal with bullying and harassment issues should they arise.</p> <p>40/5. The Conference directs that a sum of £65,000 be made available in the 2015/16 connexional year from the Fund for Training for the implementation of Positive Working Together, followed by £50,000 in 2016/2017 and £25,000 in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.</p>
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	None proposed.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	Provision of detailed guidance on positive behaviours in the Church and dealing with bullying and harassment.
Main Points	Guidance on dealing with bullying and harassment in a positive and constructive way, by focusing on appropriate behaviours within a work or church context.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Memorial M28 from the Basingstoke Circuit presented the Conference of 2013 with proposals to tackle bullying and harassment across the Church. The Conference asked that these proposals be evaluated by the Council and the results of this evaluation reported back to the Conference in 2015.
Consultations	District Chairs, Superintendents, Ministers, lay employees, Probationer Ministers, survivors of bullying and harassment.

Summary of Impact

Financial	£160,000 is included within the draft Connexional Central Services Budget from the Fund for Training.
Personnel	The guidance sits alongside provisions contained within the employment contracts of lay employees and Methodist Council employees.
Legal	The guidance has been written within the context of existing legislation relating to bullying and harassment.
Wider Connexional	The guidance would be applicable across the Connexion.
Risk	By not dealing with allegations of bullying and harassment in an appropriate way exposure to legal challenge would be possible, with financial penalties.

40. Positive Working Together

1. The Conference of 2013 received Memorial M28 'Positive Working Together' from the Basingstoke Circuit, as follows:

The Basingstoke (26/27) Circuit Meeting (Present: 31; Voting: 25 for, 1 against) believes that the Methodist Church does not currently have a shared understanding of, or sufficient ways of dealing with, issues relating to the behaviour of church members towards each other, including in respect to bullying, harassment and dealing with disagreements. We therefore propose that a four-fold approach, to be called Positive Working Together be adopted by the Church and developed to enable it to become practice in the Methodist Church.

Currently there is an assumption that everyone in the Methodist Church holds in common what is and is not acceptable behaviour in Church life. Sadly this is a poor assumption as we come from different upbringings and life experiences and do not share all values and understandings of how to relate with each other. In having no clear statements or policies around behaviour in Church life, the Church is left open to negative and destructive behaviour patterns and misuses of power – which may be unintended or may be deliberate, but which are detrimental to the life of the Church and those who are in it or visit it, preventing the Church from being a safe and inclusive community, and even creating an environment where bullying behaviours can thrive.

Respondents in a recent survey indicated that 64% had suffered bullying and comments entered in the survey indicated that there are many instances of being treated badly in the life of the Methodist Church. We do not yet have a truly safe and inclusive Church. We are concerned that the training necessary for dealing with bullying and harassment, recognised in the reply to memorials M39 and M40 (2006) has not been widely implemented.

Positive Working Together is proposed as a four-fold approach which seeks to address these issues holistically and to promote safety and inclusiveness with clarity and accountability. We believe that it is very important that all four elements are planned and implemented together. In brief the four-fold approach would be:

- a) An anti bullying policy which makes the stance of the Church clear;*
- b) A document which outlines positive ways of working together which we commit ourselves to as a Church, how we will deal respectfully with disagreements and which provides accountability;*
- c) A network of confidential support for people encountering difficult relationships in churches, for support and valuing the person, but not for 'taking sides'; and*
- d) Training for all churches which explains the other three parts of the approach, explains what bullying is and is not, how to constructively deal with negative behaviour and with power issues in the life of the Church.*

We ask the Conference to direct the Connexional Team to develop Positive Working Together so that the four-fold approach materials, and plans for implementation might be brought to the Conference of 2014 for approval.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Basingstoke meeting for raising this important matter and agrees that there are no instances where bullying and harassment are acceptable forms of behaviour. It reaffirms its statement in response to M39 and M40 in 2006 that "Such behaviour is unacceptable and not compatible with the office or standing of ministers or

other office holders. Cases of serious and persistent bullying and harassment would therefore need to be dealt with through the complaints and discipline procedures.” The Conference is also mindful of the command of Jesus to love one another. Therefore, the Conference recognises the importance of clear statements on bullying and harassment as such activities deny the freedom of the people of God.

Dealing with these issues within the Church is therefore vital, and has a particular complexity because of the interaction between paid workers, volunteers and those from the wider community which the Church seeks to serve, and potential links with issues of safeguarding. Therefore, the matters raised in this memorial require thorough investigation and a full evaluation of suitable approaches and frameworks, which may include “Positive Working Together”.

The Conference therefore directs the Methodist Council to undertake an evaluation of suitable approaches to dealing with bullying and harassment, and make an initial report to the Conference of 2015, which should include an evaluation of the proposals made by the Basingstoke Circuit.

2. In response to this Memorial a small Task Group was convened to carry out the work directed by the Conference. This was chaired by a District Chair and membership included a past President and specialist Connexional Officers in the area of Safeguarding, Training and Development, and Wellbeing. The Task Group was also advised by a specialist in conflict resolution and mediation who had carried out a significant amount of mediation work in Circuits.
3. The Task Group began by thoroughly evaluating the work that had been undertaken by the Basingstoke Circuit, for which it was grateful. Part of this evaluation included the carrying out of extensive consultation on the work produced by the Basingstoke Circuit (along with the Task Group's own developing ideas) with the following individuals and groups:
 - a) Superintendent Ministers, who were alerted to the work being done on this matter at the annual Superintendents’ Conferences and asked for comment;
 - b) A sample of Circuit Ministers who were chosen from across the Connexion representing all Districts and asked to complete an online survey;
 - c) Lay Employees, at the annual “Connecting Disciples” Conference;
 - d) A group of probationer Ministers, via one of their regular support meetings;
 - e) Carefully selected people who were survivors of bullying and harassment, and were known to the Chair of District and Past President who were members of the Task Group. This element of the consultation had to be handled extremely sensitively given the experiences that some individuals felt they had lived through; and
 - f) The Faith and Order Committee.
4. The consultation exercise affirmed the overall approach put forward by the Basingstoke Circuit and was helpful to the Working Party in shaping its consideration of this work. A detailed evaluation of the proposal contained in the Memorial is now set out.

Evaluation of the proposal to have an anti bullying policy and guidance about positive ways of working

- 5.1 The Task Group agreed on the importance of an anti bullying policy and guidance which sets out appropriate behaviours, as proposed in the Memorial. It noted that this was an important gap in the Church's overall policy framework which needed to be filled. However, given the strength of feeling about bullying and harassment which became evident as a result of the consultation exercise, and indeed the comments included in the Memorial itself, the Task

Group felt that it was imperative to undertake the work of developing a policy and detailed guidance for the Church without delay (rather than simply reporting on the results of its evaluation). The Task Group was also mindful of the fact that guidance of this nature could also be important in the context of oversight, accountability and the overall care of ministers in the provision of clear guidelines about appropriate behaviours. Finally it also noted that appropriate guidance would be a defence against a legal claim against the Conference of bullying and harassment, showing that the Church takes this seriously and had put a framework in place. As a result of these considerations it has developed *Guidelines for Promoting Good Working Relationships and Managing Conflict in the Church*, which the Council has adopted.

- 5.2 In line with the recommendations of the Memorial, this guidance is designed to provide both a clear policy statement on bullying and harassment together with comprehensive information on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The Task Group was clear that there was no point in providing a policy without accompanying information to support this including resources to empower and enable individuals subject to bullying or harassment, support those accompanying them, and prevent escalation. In evaluating the work of the Basingstoke Circuit, it also became clear that it was necessary to address the issue of managing conflict within the Church as this was often a source of bullying and harassment. Therefore, although this guidance relates primarily to issues of bullying and harassment, it also has application in conflict resolution. The Guidance draws on a range of Christian resources, and has also used examples of good practice from elsewhere, including expert individuals and the work of groups such as trades unions.
- 5.3 In evaluating the Memorial it also became apparent to the Task Group that it was necessary to set out clearly to whom the Guidance was applicable and the issues that arose from this in terms of the applicability of Standing Orders, terms in the employment contract for lay employees, and related matters. The guidance produced reflects these distinctions, and is intended for Ministers, lay employees, volunteers and others involved in the life of the Local Church. It seeks to make clear the links to other documents such as the Complaints and Discipline Process, the Methodist Council's Dignity at Work Policy and Local Employing Bodies' individual grievance procedures: the intention being to give clear signposts to correct formal routes of complaint as well as a range of tools and techniques for individuals to resolve differences informally. The Task Group believes that these signposts are essential for correct resolution of inappropriate behaviours.
- 5.4 Finally, the Task Group also considered the issue of bullying and harassment within the unique context of being a Church rather than a secular body, which had been hinted at in the proposals from the Basingstoke Circuit, and was worthy of elaboration. The Task Group felt it was necessary to say something about this within a theological context. Therefore, underpinning the guidance are the three themes of "A shared humanity", "Journeying together in learning and understanding" and "Humanity's need of God's grace". These themes were chosen because the Task Group felt that they were pertinent in light of the consultation undertaken, and the Group's own reflections on these issues. To support this element of the Guidance there are also devotional and worship resources included for those who might find them helpful.

Evaluation of the proposal for a network of confidential support for those encountering difficult relationships

6. Turning to this element of the Memorial, the Task Group noted that in some Districts there were thriving 'mediation' or similar groups, with committed individuals carrying out this work. It wished to honour existing local arrangements which were working well, and did not feel it appropriate to establish a connexional network of confidential support. There were a number

of reasons for this. Firstly, members of the Task Group had experienced similar approaches in other contexts, and noted that there were often difficulties with maintaining appropriate quality standards and boundaries in terms of the support given, and that the supporters themselves often felt conflicted in terms of their roles. It was also clear from an analysis of the consultation feedback from the survivors of bullying and harassment that expectations as to the nature of the support requested were not always realistic and could rarely be met. It was felt that this would inevitably lead to difficulties and unmet expectations.

7. In light of these findings the Task Group could not recommend this element of the Basingstoke Circuit's proposal to the Conference. However, it recognised the need for support in situations of bullying and harassment and therefore recommends the following:
 - a) That each District appoints a suitable person who will give information, not advice, about the options available to an individual experiencing bullying and harassment. Such a person would need to have a clear understanding of confidentiality issues and have self-awareness and insight. In essence, this person would act as a signpost to the approaches put forward in the Guidance, but would not advise on appropriate courses of action or approaches. Their interaction with individuals alleging bullying or harassment would therefore be limited and boundaried.
 - b) That each District maintains and nurtures its District Reconciliation Group, providing support and annual training for it. It is recognised that such Groups may have an important informal or formal role to play in individual cases of bullying and harassment.

These proposals have been included in the Guidance, which the Council has adopted, and are available on the website (www.methodist.org.uk/conference/methodist-council) and additional information about other methods of support available, including the setting up of focused support groups for individuals are covered.

Evaluation of the proposal for training for all churches in positive working together

8. The Task Group considered the proposals submitted by the Basingstoke Circuit for training. These recommend a fairly generic, widespread briefing for churches and other parties. Whilst this had some attraction for the Task Group, its research and consultation had highlighted that there were existing areas of good practice and expertise across the Connexion, and that not every District was starting from the same place.
9. In light of this, the Working Party offers a different approach which is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of individual Districts. It notes that the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) has a regional structure which includes Regional Forums. It is proposed that the Learning Network works within the context of these Forums to develop appropriate mechanisms and regional plans for the delivery of this initiative. In order to develop this work it is proposed that a sum of £65,000 be allocated from the Training Fund in the connexional year 2015/16 (to develop resources and implementation proposals), followed by £50,000 in 2016/17 (to pilot and further develop the work) and £25,000 in 2017/18 and 2018/19 (for full delivery of the development activities).

Conclusion

10. The Task Group is grateful to the Basingstoke Circuit for the work that it has done on Positive Working Together. In evaluating this it was impressed by the passion and commitment demonstrated. The Task Group has used the framework and thinking provided by the Memorial to formulate its detailed recommendations as contained in this report, along with

the results of the consultation exercise and its individual members' own understanding and experience of issues relating to bullying and harassment.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 40/1. The Conference received the Report.**
- 40/2. The Conference directed that the *Guidelines for promoting good working relationships and managing conflict within the Church* be promoted in appropriate ways.**
- 40/3. The Conference directed that each District appoints a suitable person to provide information but not advice about the options available to an individual experiencing bullying and harassment issues.**
- 40/4. The Conference directed each District to ensure that its District Reconciliation Group receives annual training and appropriate support, so that it is equipped to deal with bullying and harassment issues should they arise.**
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