

## 12. Flexible Patterns of Ministry - Conference Agenda 1999

### Report to The Methodist Conference 1999 from the Methodist Council

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This report began as a response, first, to a memorial to Conference on 'More Flexible Patterns of Ministry' and, then, to a variety of concerns about presbyteral ministry, especially itinerancy. It argues for a comprehensive change, rather than just a minor adjustment, to the system we have; and seeks to encourage flexibility in the exercise of ministry whilst at the same time building up an effective and accountable corporate body of presbyters with mutual respect and interdependence.

The report's authors found themselves addressing three key underlying questions as they worked:

- Is there a normative way of being a Methodist minister (presbyter)?
- Are 'connexionalism' and 'flexibility' bound to be in tension? How can they be complementary?
- How do we achieve flexible patterns in the practice of ministry and the development of church policy?

## 12. Flexible Patterns of Ministry

### A BACKGROUND IN RECENT METHODIST CHURCH DISCUSSIONS

#### 1 More Flexible Patterns of Ministry (Memorial 59 (1996)) and the response of the Methodist Council

Memorial 59: More Flexible Patterns of Ministry (1996) asked for proposals 'that will encourage more flexible patterns of ministry, with particular reference to the needs of presbyters, their spouses, households and families. Such patterns of ministry would include part-time working and job-sharing.'

The Conference referred the matter to the Methodist Council, who in turn asked five districts to set up small groups to discuss the matter further. Their responses varied from saying that there is enough flexibility in the system already to making proposals for a new category of part-time itinerant presbyteral ministry.

The Methodist Council then referred the matter to the Ministerial Committee of the Formation in Ministry Office for further consideration. The Council noted that the Stationing Policy Sub-Committee had already asked the Ministerial Committee to review related issues, such as current understanding and practice of 'itinerant' and 'local' ministry, 'stipendiary' and 'non-stipendiary', 'full-time' and 'part-time'.

#### 2 Itinerancy: discussion at the Stationing Policy Sub-Committee

In January 1997, the Stationing Policy Sub-Committee discussed itinerancy at some length and minuted their conversation as follows:

*(Statements written by ministers as they approach stationing) often include geographical limitations. Some people who use the word 'itinerant' are not prepared to be stationed where the Conference wishes, and appear to think that 'itinerant' means 'full-time'. There are wider issues here which arise out of people's expectations and which are related to discipline. It was agreed to ask that the Ministerial Committee place this on its agenda.*

The conversation took place against an implicit understanding of what itinerancy is: namely, that each minister is stationed each year and that 'itinerant' means being available to be stationed each year where the Conference says (see The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD) 1998 p737: Section 1: Stationing of Ministers and Deacons: especially A.1.).

#### 3 'Being in Full Connexion': The Stationing Review Group Report 1997

Between 1995 and 1997, a comprehensive review of the (then) current stationing system was undertaken. It proposed a new system of invitation and stationing of ministers (presbyters), now currently in use in the church. The Review Group's report, adopted by Conference in 1997, reaffirmed the Methodist concept of 'connexionalism', as follows:

*Our stationing procedures reflect the concept of ministers being 'in Full Connexion' with the Conference. Being 'received into Full Connexion' binds a minister to accept the authority of Conference and puts him or her into a formal relationship with the Church's stationing procedures. It also binds the Conference to sustain and support its ministers. Therefore, there are mutual obligations and commitments.*

*(Being 'received into Full Connexion') seals the relationship between a minister and the Conference and binds the two together in a relationship of mutual commitment and obligation. Part of a minister's obligation is to be available to be stationed by the Conference. This also applies when ministers wish to change their sphere of work, for example from circuit ministry to sector ministry, as they still require the permission of the Conference to do that.*

and later, when referring to itinerant ministers:

*The Church has a body of authorised and trained ministers whom, in theory, it can place in appropriate appointments, where their gifts can be used to advance the Church's work and mission. The ministers are given the opportunity to fulfil their vocation and have the security of belonging to a Church that will support and sustain*

*them throughout their lives. When ministers are available for stationing, even if an appointment cannot immediately be found, the Church has an obligation to provide them with a manse and a stipend. So the benefits to the Church and the minister are mutual.*

The report noted a number of factors which were modifying the church's understanding of 'connexionalism' and had a bearing on stationing practice, namely;

- a growing emphasis on individualism in society;
- changes in the role of women in society;
- increased theological, ecclesiological and cultural diversity;
- a wide dissemination of information at the time of stationing about available ministers and stations;
- a growth in the 'free market' approach to stationing.

It then said:

If we are to be 'faithful to our traditions' and continue to benefit from the principle of 'connexionalism', we need to do so in a way that acknowledges and responds creatively to the changes we have noted. Otherwise discontent will deepen and the stationing system will become increasingly difficult to operate.

#### 4 Ministers in Local Appointment: Methodist Council Executive – May 1998

The Methodist Council Executive had been alerted to evidence that some ministers in Local Appointment appeared to be receiving a stipend. Members were made aware that, whilst, according to SO 746, MLAs would 'not normally be provided with allowances', it is nonetheless permissible for them to receive a stipend.

Standing Orders draw a clear distinction between stipend and allowances, the latter being to meet expenses. Examples are 751(1) and (2), 013(11) and 021(6). 746(1) declares that an MLA will not normally receive allowances or accommodation (but such provision may therefore sometimes be made). It does not refer to stipends at all, and a strict reading of CPD implies that all MLAs are, by virtue of SO 751(1), entitled to a stipend. They are in full work (005ii) and are appointed to the Stations (see 746(6) and (7)). There is regretfully no definition of 'itinerant' or 'normal stationing' and it appears that every MLA who insisted on claiming a stipend (but not expenses) would have good support in Standing Orders. It was a point that had not been noticed before. It was surely unintentional and needed to be addressed.

The Executive noted that the Formation in Ministry Office was revising and strengthening guidelines about Ministry in Local Appointments, including a proposal that a Working Agreement be prepared in respect of each such appointment. This would clarify issues around stipends, allowances and expenses. The Office would be suggesting a clarification of Standing Orders so that District Policy Committees must formally approve the financial arrangements in relation to a minister in Local Appointment, as part of its consideration of the Working Agreement.

In June 1998, the Executive wrote to the Ministerial Committee, in these terms:

*There have been many changes since SO 746 was written. For instance, a minister in a half-time itinerant appointment would receive a stipend, whereas a minister in local appointment, doing thirty hours a week, would receive no stipend. It is generally understood that MLAs should not receive a stipend but some do.*

*It (is not clear) what 'allowances' means in our parlance; we have a Connexional Allowances Committee, which deals with stipends and allowances. What does 'allowance' mean to the Inland Revenue? Would 'expenses' be a better word?*

The Executive went on to say that it was important to address the policy issues raised here and in particular the payment of stipend and expenses to Ministers in Local Appointment. It suggested that it might well be necessary to redraft SO 746.

The Executive asked the Ministerial Committee to consider these issues as part of its consideration of 'flexible patterns of ministry'.

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In its subsequent discussions, the Ministerial Committee did not attempt to redraft SO 746 or, indeed, to provide additional Standing Orders to define and describe 'itinerant' for its considered opinion was that such distinctions should be removed.

### 5 'Review of the Role and Place of the Ordained Minister' (adopted by Conference 1998)

This report, commissioned by the Conference from a non-Methodist ecumenical monitoring group and drawing on a large amount of data from around the Connexion, was presented to Conference in response to Charter 95 – a message to the Methodist Church from Young People – which called for 'a total review of the place and role of the ordained in the life of the church.'. The report noted (in 2.2.1.) 'the extensive diversity of perceived understanding of the role and place of the ordained minister' in the church. It also noted a number of 'distinctive polarities, or points at which the data received seemed to pull in opposite directions'. These were described as tensions between:

- the minister as set apart for service of the people; and the minister as called from within and remaining within the people with whom one serves;
- the minister as commanding figure, able to manage, lead and unify; and the minister as a companionable figure, who is friend, listener, team-player;
- the expectation of omnicompetence on the minister's behalf; and the supposition that the minister has limited gifts or abilities;
- the minister who represents or reconciles the whole; and the minister as having her/his own personal contribution to make;
- the minister as maintainer of the church; and the minister as leader of evangelism and mission.

The report's authors were impressed by the evidence that 'Methodists in the pew place a very high value on ordained ministry and look to (ministers) for a wide and exalted range of abilities'.

The report expressed concern that the ordination services for deacons and presbyters were not referred to by respondents commenting on the role of the ordained in the modern church. It asks 'Is there a gap between Methodist liturgy and wider attitudes within Methodism at this point?'. Having said that, the report declares, 'study of the ordinal makes it clear that the roots of the notion of omnicompetence in the ordained ministry lie deep'.

The authors called for more work to be done 'in articulating and sharing a clear common understanding of the distinctive nature of ordained ministry within the ministry of all God's people'. (It may be noted that the 1998 Conference incorporated in the new ordination service a phrase strengthening the commitment to mutual sharing in ministry.)

It suggested that 'further attention be given to the stationing procedures in Methodism'. These already show 'a careful regard for the needs and expectations of the minister and the circuit/congregation(s) alike'. Yet the authors reckon that 'further thought should be given to appropriate ways of enabling ministers and congregations to work out a shared understanding and practice together'.

It concluded:

*It has become clear to us that the role and place of the ordained ministry can no longer be taken for granted in a way that the traditional notion of itinerancy seems to imply. The evidence we have seen indicates that there is no longer anything like a standard expectation. Consequently, unless there is to be growing fragmentation and tension in church life, ministers and congregations will need to be encouraged to share in exploring and re-defining their shared ministry. Ultimately, this may be something close to a continual process, but it is most obviously called for during the first year after a minister takes up a new station.*

The Conference directed the Methodist Council to consider the implications of the report and the debate upon it, to refer the report to its Ministerial Committee for consideration in connection with the further reply to Memorial M59 (1996) and, after consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to report to the Conference of 1999.

## **B OTHER STARTING POINTS**

There is increasing evidence of flexibility of forms of ministry operating at present and the blurring of categories such as itinerant/local appointment, paid/unpaid, full-time/part-time, with the result that many people in all parts of the connexion are making ad hoc decisions which have begun to constitute a kind of 'case law' (or at least a body of precedents). Further variations arise in ecumenical settings. Evidence has also emerged of considerable disparities in the terms of service of itinerant ministers, which threaten to undermine their collegiality.

The following are cited as examples of ad hoc arrangements, which are beginning to render existing categories and norms redundant:

### **1 Emerging flexible patterns**

Flexible patterns of ministry are emerging as indicated by these examples:

- Two ministers, married to each other, sharing one-and-a-half circuit appointments;
- A minister, working part-time in circuit and part in a sector as a teacher;
- A minister, working two-thirds in circuit and one third in the Connexional Team;
- A sector minister (teacher), also with pastoral charge of a small church;
- A minister, part-time in circuit and part-time a tutor in a theological college;
- A minister, with young children, in a half-time appointment;
- Ministers in local appointment, working with a high degree of flexibility, in terms of their time commitment and the kind of work they do;
- Circuits employing 'active supernumeraries'; ministers who have technically retired but who work in part-time pastoral charges, often occupying a circuit manse.

In spite of such an emerging variety, it appears that many ministers and circuits are not aware of the possibilities for flexible patterns of working.

### **2 Developments in Ministry in Local Appointment**

A person may only candidate for Ministry in Local Appointment if a draft scheme of appointment is prepared by a local circuit (usually the one where the candidate lives and wishes to minister); an appointment in which she or he will be stationed after training. Standing Orders allow for a ministry to be exercised in another circuit or neighbouring district (746 (3)) and specifies the process to be undertaken in agreeing a precise scheme of appointment for the minister to take up.

Since ministers in Local Appointment are stationed and subject to similar re-invitation procedures to itinerant ministers, it was inevitable that the time would come when some did not receive an invitation for a further period in a circuit, or wished to work elsewhere. Provision is then made for such ministers to move to another approved MLA appointment (SO 746(7)), thereby introducing a limited degree of itinerancy. Some would argue that itinerant ministers can so limit their itinerancy that they are no less restricted by geography than MLAs who are moving to a new appointment!

Already (in A4 above) it has been noted that there is a variety of practice in the way circuits remunerate ministers in Local Appointment, in terms of allowances and expenses. In a few rare cases, a stipend is paid and /or a manse provided.

### **3 Ministers applying to the Stationing Advisory Committee – SAC (formerly the Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments – ACMA)**

The number of ministers applying annually to SAC seeking approval to move to other appointments has increased from 29 in 92/93 to 47 in 96/97.

Amongst those seeking an 'other appointment', most are considering posts where ordination is stated as essential and intrinsic to the performance of the post, e.g. chaplaincy. Indeed, there has been an increase in the number of applications for chaplaincy posts whether hospital, educational or prison.

In a presentation to the Ministerial Committee in September 1997, John Cooke, secretary of the (then) Advisory Committee on Ministerial Appointments, said:

*At forty or fifty applications in any one year, we are looking at a relatively small percentage of the total number of active Methodist Ministers, but the cumulative figure*

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*makes it a significant percentage. ACMA has the responsibility for engaging with a whole series of issues presented by those who are often on the margins of ministry, which may highlight issues and concerns that the majority of ministers face.*

*We are concerned with issues of vocation and how it is appropriately expressed in many of the complex areas of our society; issues of frustration with circuit ministry, personal and domestic pressures, burn-out and struggles of faith, as well as nurturing and harnessing an entrepreneurial spirit among many of those who apply for Sectors and Other Appointments.*

*ACMA can be a sensitive barometer measuring the aspirations and enthusiasms of many in ministry as well as encountering the casualties; and those living with justifiable and unjustifiable frustrations as well as quite profound personal and domestic issues. This area, as well as 'Without Appointment', acts as a (safety) valve and one that needs to be attended to.*

### 4 Concern expressed by the District Chairs, Meeting – June 1998

District Chairs are aware that many ministers define a fairly small geographical area within which they are willing to move. They are also aware of a fair number of ministers who are looking to redirect their ministry away from the circuits.

One recently appointed District Chair observed that, in one year, 6 ministers from his district had sought an interview with SAC (then ACMA). He asked:

*Can we continue with the present itinerant circuit system as the norm from which any other appointment is dealt with as an aberration requiring special permission?*

He also said:

*I have also wondered about the apparent increase in clergy stress at a time when the member/minister ratio is falling. Is it due to ministers seeking to move in directions in which the 'system' (connexionally or locally) doesn't really allow them to go (e.g. developing specialisms, etc.)?*

*My anxiety is that we could be trying to make a system work that is no longer appropriate to the way in which we are being led.*

It is clear that many District Chairs are concerned about the way in which ministers set limitations upon the location and setting of their next appointment, changing the notion of itinerancy, which is in itself predicated upon 'availability for the stations'. The more ministers stipulate strict conditions for an appointment, say, on geography, type of church, styles of worship, mission and ministry, the more the church's ability to respond to the needs of the whole connexion is limited.

### 5 Placing limits on itinerancy

The issues, raised by the Stationing Policy Sub-Committee in A2 above, are supported by a great deal of evidence from the experience of those closely involved in stationing and invitation activity, especially circuit stewards, District Chairs and Lay Representatives to the Stationing Committee; evidence such as:

- churches, with a strong identikit of the minister they are looking for – in terms of age, gender, number of children, sexuality, as well as competencies to work successfully with 'all sorts and conditions' of people in all manner of contexts, be they pastoral, liturgical, administrative or missionary;
- churches, wanting a minister who will 'fit in' with existing values, traditions, worship patterns, etc;
- itinerant ministers, who wish to stay within a relatively small geographical area for 'family reasons', including spouse's job, children's education, proximity of parents and friends, or because they find a particular area congenial;
- itinerant ministers, who are looking for an appointment of a particular theological outlook, style of worship or spirituality;
- itinerant ministers, who accept or reject an appointment, depending on the suitability of the manse;
- itinerant ministers, who insist on being or not being a superintendent;

- itinerant ministers, who wish to remain in a particular kind of setting, e.g. inner-city, urban, sub-urban, rural or whatever;
- itinerant ministers who wish to specialise in one or two aspects of ministry and resist being stereotypically omniscient;
- ministers, who wish to have control over how and when they move into a new appointment;
- ministers, in sector or other appointments, who resist the idea that they might make a move into a circuit appointment.

In practice, it is often felt by those attempting to match ministers and appointments that ministers' stated preferences are, in fact, demands. When all this is taken into account, it's a wonder that ministers find appointments and appointments ministers.

### 6 Variations in the level of ministers' incomes

There is evidence that itinerant ministers have considerable variations of income from their work as ministers:

- some are paid above the minimum stipend recommended by Conference;
- some are given an additional 'allowance', set by Conference (e.g. Superintendents, District Chairs);
- some are given discretionary allowances, arranged locally, for specific purposes (e.g. car expenses beyond the agreed Fixed Profit Car Scheme, gardening expenses, hospitality allowances, book allowances, maintenance of car allowances during a sabbatical);
- some receive far more fees from weddings and funerals than others;
- some choose to take 'extra' funerals in order to boost their income;
- some earn additional income from chaplaincies;
- some have better appointed and maintained manses.

## C ISSUES OF ETHOS AND PRINCIPLE

### 1 Together 'in Full Connexion'

Three decades ago, ministers used to talk easily and sincerely about the 'brotherhood of the ministry'. Whilst the phrase may now be anachronistic, it held within it a feeling of solidarity, mutual support and corporate accountability. There was a shared commitment to the view that the church's agenda, say in stationing, had pre-eminence over an individual's personal agenda. There was a sense that the words of the Covenant Service were especially apposite to those 'in Full Connexion', so that one's 'natural inclinations and temporal interests' were subordinated to the needs of the church; and all within an interdependent community – the Connexion. There are still many ministers who seek to go where they can be of the greatest service.

After a couple of decades of the heightening of individualism, leading to a current ethos of 'each person achieving her or his own full potential', with the concomitant belief that 'each person is the best judge of the appropriateness of a particular course of action for himself or herself', the church now experiences great difficulty in stationing individuals to fulfil the Connexion's goals. Indeed, there is a feeling abroad that some ministers are using the church as a platform from which to exercise their own personal vocation, even challenging the Connexion's right to impose its will when there is disagreement.

### 2 Equality and fairness

Methodist ministers have been amongst the first to express pride that one of the characteristics of their church is a sense of equality and fairness. However, it is clear, from some of the instances cited in B6 above, that ministers' incomes vary considerably, with even circuit colleagues receiving very different amounts. It is evident that some ministers' incomes, received in the course of their normal ministry, can be as much as £3000 p.a. more than others, even though the latter are receiving the minimum stipend and fair working expenses. Whilst certain additional allowances are set by Conference (e.g. to superintendents), any discretionary allowances are negotiated locally.

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The church is now in a dilemma: should an effort be made to affirm and effect equality and fairness in the payment of ministerial stipends and allowances, so that each minister is remunerated according to agreed universal levels?

### D FLEXIBILITY WITH FAIRNESS

When the Ministerial Committee was asked by the Methodist Council to address the issues set out at the beginning of this report, it asked Malcolm Braddy, Chair of ACMA (now SAC) and Chair of East Anglia District, to present a paper addressing 'flexibility issues' as they pertained to presbyteral ministers. Whilst the committee did not agree with everything, it found his paper a most helpful catalyst in subsequent discussions. There follows a summary, with extracts, of the paper:

*At the moment the normative appointment for a minister is a full time, itinerant, circuit appointment. Some presbyters seek permission to serve in one of the rich variety of ways complementing full time, itinerant, circuit ministry. Many ministers seem unaware of such opportunities, seeing full-time, itinerant, circuit appointments as the approved pattern. Circuit leaders feel equally bound to look for full-time, itinerant, ministers, whilst often entertaining visions of a more flexible pattern of ministry for their circuits.*

*It is time to challenge this normative view of appointments, for it belongs to a bygone age. The rich variety of opportunity, already available through the structures, makes it possible to develop both ministers and appointments.*

*Through their ordination and reception into Full Connexion, ministers are to be the focus of the church's apostolic mission to the world. To achieve this, they will have to be released from a maintenance ministry in the church. Time after time ministers are frustrated because they are placed in churches which have no spark and take no risks.*

*Full Connexion provides for the circuits the reassurance that they are not alone and that any experimentation in maintenance, mission, evangelism and social caring has the support of other Methodists.*

*Ministers should be encouraged to think and prepare creatively, so that they can move easily between different kinds of appointment, exercising the freedom of the Spirit as they develop their personalities and functions in relationship with God and their fellow workers, ministering effectively in the world.*

*Circuits should be encouraged to choose diverse solutions to their staffing needs, deploying ministers and others in different modes of ministry and working in partnership with other institutions in their area.*

*The vast majority of ministers are full-time and itinerant. In the main, they are to be found with pastoral charge of several churches, adopting a maintenance mode of work to safeguard the ongoing life of the circuit. However, there is disquiet amongst many ministers that this role is not enough. It is narrow and keeps people looking inwards with the result that most ministers are confined to the church and ministers become monochrome. Most ministers break out naturally, for example, into schools for assemblies or governorships, into charities for management or to hone specialist skills. More would experiment if it became the norm that an itinerant minister could become part-time in a circuit and part-time in another field of activity, which is also paid.*

*The most significant challenge to the normative pattern comes from the changing ratio of ministers to members in the church. Soon, there will simply be insufficient members to foot the bill for all those ministers who wish to be paid by the church. Because of the dead hand of the normative pattern, ministers are being compelled to maintain structures designed for a larger membership, instead of being released for more imaginative ways to serve the age. A move to more flexible patterns of ministry will enable Methodism to meet the new membership and economic climate in the church with greater ease.*

*Might it not be right to give itinerant ministers permission to provide some of their income from personal endeavour? (After all, ministers in local appointment do this.) Or, why not give some permission to work part-time, thereby reducing burnout or applications for early retirement?*

*For themselves, circuits need to develop their ideas and seek exciting and creative partnerships with presbyters and other institutions, actively recruiting presbyters to share missionary situations as well as maintaining existing work.*

*It is not necessary to increase the number of categories of presbyteral ministry to achieve a new flexibility. What is needed is a greater facility to move between various possibilities, by promoting flexibility and removing the implication that full-time itinerancy is the only viable way for ministers and circuits.*

*Some have suggested that all categories of ministry be dropped (e.g. itinerant, sector, MLA, other appointment, supernumerary). This would enable a freer movement between various kinds of appointment and achieve a greater collegiality amongst ministers, exercising their gifts in a variety of ways and locations.*

### E RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRINCIPLES

In the light of all that has been written already in this report, some general principles are now proposed:

#### 1 Establish a single ‘Accredited List of ministers in Full Connexion’.

It is important to question any notion that ‘itinerant, paid, circuit-based ordained ministry’ is the norm and therefore the best. Many efforts have been made over the years to affirm the authenticity of ministry in local appointment, sectors or ‘other appointment’ and yet such ministers have often felt marginalised. Ministers, with sound and acceptable reasons for being ‘without appointment’, have often felt abandoned. Such ministries are defined and regulated by often long and convoluted Standing Orders. This only compounds the sense of being second-best. It is important that we cherish such ministries and that we continue to cherish those in itinerant ministry by integrating them all in a single list.

**We propose, therefore, that ministers in the active work cease to be categorised and that all should be ‘ordained ministers in Full Connexion’.** Ministers would then be able to move into any kind of appointment without seeking a change of category, subject to normal stationing procedures and disciplines.

Corollaries of this would be:

- appointments will vary, e.g. stipendiary or non-stipendiary; full-time or part-time, with a manse or without a manse; in a Methodist church setting or outside it;
- candidature for one ordained presbyteral ministry in Full Connexion (not for itinerant, MLA, or sectors as at present);
- ministers would no longer be obliged to seek permission to change the focus of their ministry, though they would still be subject to the discipline of stationing and invitation procedures;
- a code of conduct will be designed so that ministers, in appointments controlled by the church, give proper notice if they decide to apply for an appointment elsewhere.

Even though it is reckoned that there will be no categories of ministers in Full Connexion, it is still recognised that provision will have to be made for ministers to be ‘without appointment’, whilst still retaining recognition as ministers in Full Connexion. Arrangements should be made so that such ministers can be both supported and held accountable within connexional life.

#### 2 Clarify the obligations laid upon all ministers in Full Connexion.

In its doctrinal clause, the Deed of Union says that ‘ministers are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock’ and are ‘set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments... for the sake of Church Order’. This relative lack of prescription has enabled us to hold a variety of views as to what is distinctive about the ministerial role. However, it has allowed for the growth of the kind of omnicompetence models described in A5 above. Many church members and ministers are now looking for a clearer understanding of what it means to be a minister in Full Connexion.

The reports ‘The Making of Ministry’ (1996/7) and ‘Connexional Training Strategies’ (1998) set out a working definition of what is distinctive about presbyteral ministry in the Methodist

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Church: it is to be a member of the order of ministers (presbyters), who together exercise oversight of:

- the ministry of the Word;
- the ministry of the Sacrament;
- the ministry of Pastoral Charge.

The ordained minister co-ordinates and involves others (lay people and deacons) in each of the above but the combination of them is unique to the minister. This triple oversight is expressed in particular acts of mission and pastoral care. Such particular acts could be spelt out in each situation in a description of appointment and/or a working agreement.

In Methodist tradition, a 'charge' is often given, say, when a minister is inducted to a new appointment or a probationer is sent forward for ordination. She or he is 'charged' with the responsibilities of pastoral oversight. Yet this solemn charge is always exercised with respect to the corporate responsibility of church council, circuit meeting, district synod or Conference.

**When men and women seek Reception into Full Connexion as ministers, it must be clear what obligations are laid upon them.** Ordination and being in Full Connexion should not be a platform for individualism, but rather signs of commitment by people, who are about to engage in ordained ministry, within an interdependent and mutually accountable ministry and connexion. **Obligations, laid upon all\* ministers in Full Connexion, might include:**

- a) Being accountable to the Conference for living responsibly within the values, beliefs and practices of the Methodist Church;
- b) Participating in an agreed Rule of Life, related to the threefold responsibilities of the presbyteral ministry: ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Charge;
- c) Exercising a ministry of Word and Sacrament;
- d) Being responsive to the stationing needs of the church;
- e) Being committed to engage with those in their work context about how ministry will be exercised, especially through Working Agreements and Accompanied Self-Appraisal;
- f) Being committed to finding appropriate ways to engage in the life of the circuit where they appear on the stations;
- g) Attending the district ministerial and representative synods (which should be scheduled so that they do not always give preference to those in circuit appointments);
- h) Participating in agreed patterns of Continuing Development in Ministry.

(\*Exemptions would be negotiated for those recognised as those being 'without appointment'.)

### 3 Establish a 'Description of Appointment' and a 'Working Agreement' for each appointment within the control of the church.

It is important to ensure that the church:

- can be more imaginative and creative in its mission and ministry;
- can engage ministers who will respond readily to agreed circuit mission and ministry policies;
- is able to provide opportunity for flexibility in the kind of appointments offered by circuits;
- can respond to and cope with a wide variety of appointments (e.g. stipendiary/non-stipendiary; full-time/part-time; etc.);
- addresses the issues raised in the 'Review of the Role and Place of the Ordained Minister', especially the concern that something be done about expectations of omnicompetence both by the church and ministers themselves.

In current practice in the church, every Lay Worker appointment has a contract of employment and a job description (SO 438A). Circuits establishing a Ministry in Local Appointment are required to design 'a scheme for the exercise of the minister's ministry in that Circuit, containing clear provisions as to the particular responsibilities in that appointment' (SO746(7)). Certain itinerant ministers have agreed job descriptions also (e.g. members of the connexional Team,

college and course tutors). However, it is rare for any kind of working agreement to be established for itinerant stipendiary appointments.

**We therefore recommend that, in respect to each ministerial appointment in the control of the church:**

- **before an invitation, re-invitation or appointment procedure begins, each responsible body (e.g. Circuit Meeting) prepares a clear ‘Description of Appointment’ for each presbyteral, diaconal and lay worker appointment in its jurisdiction.** In respect of circuit appointments, such descriptions would be monitored by a district Stationing Panel (appointed and authorised by the district Synod, and including the Chair of the District, the Lay Representative to the connexional Stationing Committee and the district Lay Employment officer). Similar arrangements would be established for ministers working in other settings (e.g. district chairs, college and course tutors, Connexional Team).
- **once a new ministerial appointment commences or is renewed, a ‘Working Agreement’ be negotiated with each minister.** This to be established in relation to the description of appointment (see above paragraph). This working agreement should also be monitored by a district Stationing Panel or other responsible body.
- **similar agreements would be established between the Connexion and those working in appointments not in the control of the church** (i.e. what are now called ‘sector’ and ‘other appointments’). Such agreements should be negotiated and monitored in the district where a minister resides.

**In order to arrive at an appropriate description of appointment and working agreement in a circuit appointment, we recommend that full account be taken of any local church and circuit policy reviews.** It would be good if any such reviews could be undertaken ahead of each new invitation or appointment or before an invitation or appointment is renewed. Such reviews should be based on the reviews of local church life currently being developed by the ‘Resourcing Mission’ office in the Connexional Team.

Circuit leadership teams will require training if the church is to achieve the best possible Working Agreements.

Such an approach will enable circuits and districts to evolve a creative and integrated strategy towards mission and ministry; realistic about maintenance, but also inspiring mission. Ministers will be able to serve in ways which are flexible, fulfilling and accountable. Circuits and ministers will be able to negotiate working arrangements which take maximum account of the needs of an appointment and the particular gifts and experience of ministers.

During the past decade, a great deal has been written about the incidence of stress and low morale amongst ministers in many denominations. Much of this has been attributed to our inability to address expectations of omniscience, omnipresence and omniscience put upon ministers by themselves as well as others. It has been difficult to clarify roles and define working boundaries. Establishing creative and realistic working agreements, which take account of the gifts and strengths of ministers and how they can be exercised in a particular ministry and mission context can only raise morale and reduce stress.

#### **4 Seek to establish universally applied levels of stipend and allowances**

Over many years, an imbalance has grown up between actual levels of remuneration between ministers. Some ministers in stations controlled by the church are receiving higher remuneration than others. This has happened at the same time as we have argued that we pay stipends (not salaries) because it is our intention to provide enough, by way of allowance, manse and expenses, so allowing a minister to exercise her or his vocation without undue anxiety. It is important that the principle of mutual support and accountability in the corporate body of Methodist ministers is reflected in fair and equal remuneration. Even if differences in stipend and allowances remain, there should be transparency in all financial arrangements.

**It is recommended, therefore, that the Methodist Council (in consultation with the Connexional Allowances Committee) should be instructed to establish a consistent and clear nomenclature for ‘stipends’, ‘allowances’, and ‘expenses’, since there is confusion about how these terms are applied.**

## 12. Flexible Patterns of Ministry

The Connexional Allowances Committee should be encouraged in their current investigations, with a view to recommending:

- appropriate standards and mechanisms for the reimbursement of legitimate expenses;
- mechanisms to authorise additional payments to compensate for excessively high costs related to the geographical location of a minister's station.

The Methodist Council should consult the church to discover whether, in the interests of equality and fairness:

- new stipend levels should be established so that all ministers, paid by the Methodist Church, whether circuit ministers, active supernumeraries, superintendents, district chairs, college and course tutors, members of the connexional Team, etc., receive the same level of stipend, with proportional amounts paid to part-timers;
- mechanisms should be established for the integration of chaplaincy, wedding and funeral fees into the agreed stipend (it was noted that ministers of the Church of England and some other churches do not retain funeral and wedding fees as an addition to their stipends);
- there should be some consultation with ministers in other appointments about the income they receive, with a view to their paying to the church any figure which represents a significant excess of income compared with ministers in stipendiary circuit appointments;
- stipends should be increased, to assist the change to a single agreed level of stipend and the integration of wedding and funeral fees.

(Whilst it is beyond the remit of this report, it should nevertheless be assumed that similar financial arrangements should be made for deacons.)

### 5 Appointment and manse for life?

The report of the Stationing Review Group (already quoted in A3 above) said:

*The ministers are given the opportunity to fulfil their vocation and have the security of belonging to a Church that will support and sustain them throughout their lives. When ministers are available for stationing, even if an appointment cannot immediately be found, the Church has an obligation to provide them with a manse and a stipend. So the benefits to the Church and the minister are mutual.*

Although the report does not say so, these words were written of itinerant ministers, since it is only those who have been available for stationing as itinerant, who have been guaranteed a manse and a stipend. Manse and stipend are denied to those without appointment, in sectors, other appointments and local appointments, even though some such presbyters can endure hardship in honouring their calling.

If the church is to move away from categories of minister and have only one category, namely, those in Full Connexion; and, if we wish to achieve a degree of flexibility which will benefit both ministers and the church: bearing in mind that already a significant proportion of ministers do not receive a stipend or live in a manse, perhaps it should be recognised that the time has come when the church can no longer guarantee an appointment for life to any minister.

Having said that, it is acknowledged that, to have a flexible ordained ministry, the church will still provide appointments which include both stipend and manse, albeit to fewer ministers in the future. Clearly, more work will have to be done on the criteria which will help determine which appointments will provide manse and/or stipend and which will not.

**It is therefore recommended that the Methodist Council instigates a broad-ranging consultation with a view to establishing whether, in the last resort, the Connexion should be bound to find an appointment, a stipend and manse to every minister in Full Connexion.**

(The attention of the working group was also drawn to the issue of the 'occupation of manses by ministers'. It was noted that 'the implications of ministers being required to live in accommodation provided under SO 753' is still being investigated by the Methodist Council: MC/98/75.)

## F CONCLUSION

During its work, the Ministerial Committee was struck by the phrase ‘flexibility with fairness’. The cluster of concerns, presented by various interests, revealed a concern that many in the church were calling for more flexibility in ministry, both for ministers and the church. The committee also became aware of the erosion of collegiality amongst ministers.

The committee became increasingly aware of the emergence of new patterns of ministry, which were changing long-standing norms about the way ordained presbyteral ministry is ordered in the Methodist Church.

It also became clear that itinerant stipendiary ministers are receiving variable levels of remuneration and vary in their commitment to itinerancy, both geographical and ecclesial.

The report’s recommendations are offered in the belief that, if the Methodist Church is to cohere both in its mission and corporate life, those in Full Connexion, presbyters and deacons, should be deployed in imaginative and creative ways. Hence, flexibility is essential to an effective ministry. However it is crucial that ministers cohere as an order, committed to one another, interdependent and accountable to the whole church.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

(bracketed numbers referred to page and paragraph in main text)

- 1 That ministers in the active work cease to be categorised and that all should be: ‘ordained ministers in Full Connexion’ (p.255: para.E1).

The corollaries of this are:

- appointments will vary, e.g. stipendiary or non-stipendiary; full-time or part-time, with a manse or without a manse; in a Methodist church setting or outside it;
  - candidature will be for one ordained presbyteral ministry in Full Connexion (not for itinerant, MLA or sectors as at present);
  - ministers will no longer be obliged to seek permission to change the focus of their ministry; though they will still be subject to the discipline of stationing and invitation procedures;
  - a code of conduct will be designed so that ministers, in appointments controlled by the church, give proper notice if they decide to apply for an appointment elsewhere. (p.255: para.1)
- 2 That before an invitation, re-invitation or appointment procedure begins, each responsible body (e.g. circuit meeting) will prepare a clear ‘Description of Appointment’ for each presbyteral, diaconal and lay worker appointment in its jurisdiction (p.257: para.E3).
  - 3 That once a new ministerial appointment commences or is renewed, a ‘Working Agreement’ will be established with each minister. This to be established in relation to the Description of Appointment. This Working Agreement will also be monitored by a district Stationing Panel or other responsible body (p.258: para.E3).
  - 4 That similar agreements will be established between the connexion and those working in appointments not in the control of the church (i.e. what are now called ‘sector’ and ‘other appointments’). Such agreements should be negotiated and monitored in the district where a minister resides (p.258: para.E3).
  - 5 That, in order to arrive at an appropriate description of appointment and working agreement in a circuit appointment, full account be taken of any local church and circuit policy reviews. It is recommended that any such reviews be undertaken ahead of each new invitation or appointment or before an invitation or appointment is renewed (p.258. para.E3).
  - 6 That the Methodist Council brings to Conference a report clarifying the obligations placed upon those who seek Reception into Full Connexion as a minister. Such obligations might include:
    - Being accountable to the Conference for living responsibly within the values, beliefs and practices of the Methodist Church;
    - Participating in an agreed Rule of Life, related to the threefold responsibilities of presbyteral ministry: ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Charge;

## ***12. Flexible Patterns of Ministry***

- Exercising a ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Methodist Church;
  - Being responsive to the stationing needs of the church;
  - Being committed to engage with those in their work context about how ministry will be exercised, especially through Working Agreements and Accompanied Self-Appraisal;
  - Being committed to finding appropriate ways to engage in the life of the circuit where they appear on the stations;
  - Attending the district ministerial and representative synods (which should be scheduled so that they do not always give preference to those in circuit appointments);
  - Participating in agreed patterns of Continuing Development in Ministry.  
(NB exemptions will be negotiated for those recognised as being 'without appointment' – p.256: para. E2.)
- 7 That the Methodist Council (in consultation with the Connexional Allowances Committee) be instructed to establish a consistent and clear nomenclature for 'stipends', 'allowances', and 'expenses', since there is confusion about how these terms are applied.. (p.259: para.4).
- 8 That the Connexional Allowances Committee be encouraged in their investigation with a view to recommending:
- appropriate standards and mechanisms for the reimbursement of legitimate expenses;
  - mechanisms to authorise additional payments to compensate for excessively high costs related to the geographical location of a minister's station.  
(p.259: para.4)
- 9 That the Methodist Council be instructed to consult widely to discover whether, in the interests of equality:
- new stipend levels should be established so that all ministers, paid by the Methodist Church, whether circuit ministers, active supernumeraries, superintendents, district chairs, college and course tutors, members of the connexional Team, etc., receive the same level of stipend, with proportional amounts paid to part-timers;
  - mechanisms should be established for the integration of chaplaincy, wedding and funeral fees into the agreed stipend;
  - there should be some consultation with ministers in other appointments about the income they receive, compared with ministers in stipendiary circuit appointments;
  - stipends should be increased, to assist the change to a single agreed level of stipend and the integration of wedding and funeral fees. (p.259-260: para.4)
- 10 That the Methodist Council instigate a broad-ranging consultation with a view to establishing whether, in the last resort, the Connexion should be bound to find an appointment, a stipend and manse for every minister in Full Connexion. (p.260: para.5)

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

- 12/1.** The Conference receives the report and commends it to the Circuits and Districts for study and response by the first week of January 2001.
- 12/2.** The Conference instructs the Methodist Council, in the light of the responses from circuits and districts, to bring a further report on recommendations 1-5 to Conference no later than 2002.
- 12/3.** The Conference instructs the relevant bodies to do further work required by recommendations 6-10 and report to the Conference no later than 2002.