

METHODIST CONFERENCE 2002 REPORT

Local Preachers and Safeguarding

The policy of the Conference, as expressed by resolution of the Conference, is that all Local Preachers shall sign safeguarding declarations, indicating whether or not they have convictions or cautions for offences against children and young people. It is the belief of the Conference that Local Preachers, whether or not they work directly with children and young people in the Church, are nevertheless seen as people in whom the Church has invested trust and the authority to lead worship. They are seen as safe people. As part of our continual striving for good practice in child protection, the Conference has therefore required them to sign Safeguarding B declaration forms.

The vast majority of Local Preachers have signed. A small number of Local Preachers have resigned rather than do so. By the end of January 2002 the position across the Connexion was as follows, following an inquiry by the Connexional Local Preachers' Secretary:

- 30 circuits had not responded to his inquiry
- 24 circuits have indicated they are awaiting some responses, but have not indicated that they anticipate any problems (although this does not rule out the possibility of refusals)
- 10 circuits have people who have refused to sign (17 individual Local Preachers)

At two of its meetings this year, the Methodist Council debated what to do about those who refused to sign Safeguarding B.

There was a suggestion that the Conference should be invited to amend Standing Order 568 - Rights and Duties - so that those who refused to sign disqualified themselves from being Local Preachers.

The advice of the Law and Polity Committee was sought. Its reply was as follows:

The Law and Polity Committee was of the opinion that to deprive a Local Preacher of that status without bringing a charge and affording an opportunity of meeting it and dealing with the proposed penalty would be contrary to natural justice and to the requirements of due process, and would for that reason be vulnerable to challenge in the courts by judicial review or in other proceedings, especially since a fully articulated procedure for dealing with allegations of "words, acts or omissions which are incompatible with the office of the person complained against" (Standing Order 020(2)(ii)) is available in the Church's own disciplinary code.

In the light of that advice, the Council invites the Conference to approve the following course of action, that:

- i) Non-responding circuits will be followed up by the appropriate District Chair;

ii) The Local Preachers' Office will monitor awaited responses and if difficulties arise refer to the appropriate District Chair;

iii) A letter from the Secretary of the Conference, on behalf of the Methodist Council, will be sent to individual Local Preachers, via their superintendent minister (to retain pastoral confidentiality), pointing out that only a few individuals have refused to sign the declaration and asking them to reconsider their response (enclosing a declaration for them to sign) or to undertake a police check. Each person will be offered a pastoral conversation with the Chair of District if that would prove helpful. A date will be given by which a response must be made. The superintendent will be responsible for communicating the response to the Secretary of the Conference.

iv) If individuals fail to respond by the given date or still refuse to sign a declaration or undergo a police check the Connexional Local Preachers' Secretary will make a complaint against the Local Preacher under Standing Order 020(2)(ii).

RESOLUTION

12/9. The Conference authorises the course of action described in i) to iv) above.