

Substitutes for Local Church Representatives at the Circuit Meeting

Summary

A frequently asked question is, "Can local churches send substitutes for their representatives to the Circuit Meeting when for any reason those representatives cannot attend?" After consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, this paper proposes that this be allowed for, when those substitutes are so designated at the same time as the primary election.

1. Standing Order 510(1)(viii) allows for local church representatives to the Circuit Meeting in the following terms: "representatives elected by the Church Council of each local church from its own members in numbers specified by the Circuit Meeting."

Standing Order 510(6) states that the number of representatives may range from one to eight and that no church shall have more representatives than a church which has more members.

Standing Order 510(5) states that decisions under Clause (1)(viii) shall be taken before the beginning of the year to which they relate.

Standing Orders 504 and 607 provide for appointments to be for one year and to take effect "from the date specified in the resolution of appointment." The appointment year can therefore be chosen by the appointing body.

2. The Circuit Meeting makes important decisions on a range of subjects, amongst which are circuit finances and circuit invitations and extensions. From time to time the Circuit Meeting acts as Managing Trustee with the attendant responsibilities for each individual member. That is why Standing Order 514(2) says that the members of the meeting shall be determined by name before the meeting begins.

3. For that reason, the idea of *casual* substitutes cannot be entertained. It would tend to diminish individual responsibility for decisions and could lead to accusations of "packing" the meeting when controversial items are on the agenda.

4. However, it could be the case that smaller churches in particular, with only one or two representatives, could be denied participation in decisions if their duly elected representatives were unable to attend.

5. The Law and Polity Committee has considered an earlier Methodist Council paper on the subject. The minute of its discussion is as follows:

The Secretary presented Paper LP/02/04. Some members of the committee had responded to a request made in the autumn for comments on the paper. Most had favoured the acceptance of substitutes, but

in discussion several members emphasised the danger that managing trustee business would be conducted without the proper safeguards. It was agreed that (i) the substantive issue was one of policy for the Methodist Council, but that (ii) if any power to appoint substitutes were conferred it should be exercisable only by the Church Council, and only at the same time as the primary appointments, and (iii) the points made about managing trusteeship should be taken into account. One suggestion for consideration was that substitutes should be voting members of the Circuit Meeting only for business other than managing trustee business. The Paper will be re-drafted in the Conference Office in the light of the discussion and taken to the Methodist Council.

6. If the Council is persuaded on the grounds of proper participation in the decisions of the Circuit, especially for smaller churches, then the following resolution is offered by the Methodist Council as a suitable amendment to Standing Orders to allow for up to two substitutes to be named and elected at the same time as the representatives of the local church to the Circuit Meeting are elected.

RESOLUTION

46/19. The Conference amends Standing Order 510 by adding:

510 [The Circuit Meeting] Constitution

(7) A Church Council may, when electing its representatives under head (viii) of clause (1), appoint not more than two of its own members as substitutes, who may attend a meeting of the Circuit Meeting as members in place of representatives who cannot do so. If a substitute is to attend, the Superintendent and the secretary of the meeting shall, if possible, be informed before they prepare the list of members under Standing Order 514(2), and in any event any substitute shall ensure that the meeting is informed before it is asked to adopt that list.