

**SECTION 56: LOCAL PREACHERS**

**Section 56 Local Preachers**

**560 Local Preachers' Meeting.**

(1) The Local Preachers' Meeting shall consist of:

(i) the ex-officio members specified in Standing Order 552;

(iA) the presbyters, presbyteral probationers, student presbyters and persons authorised to serve the Church as ministers under Standing Order 733 who are, in each case, eligible under Standing Order 510(1)(ii) to join the Circuit Meeting, whether or not they have elected to do so;

(ii) any deacons, diaconal probationers and diaconal students who are local preachers and any persons authorised to serve the Church as deacons under Standing Order 733 with authority to preach under clause (5) thereof who are, in each case, members of the Circuit Meeting;

(iii) all local preachers who are members in the Circuit;

(iiiA) any local preachers who are employed by the Circuit under Standing Order 570 to perform duties which include preaching or assisting in preaching (who shall be primarily accountable to the Local Preachers' Meeting of the Circuit in which they are employed); and

(iv) any persons who are for the time being authorised to serve as local preachers in the Circuit under Standing Order 566B(1) or (2).

Cl. 40 of the Deed of Union (Book II, Part 1) provides that Local Preachers' Meetings shall be constituted in such manner, of such persons and with and subject to such powers, duties and provisions as the Conference may provide.

For the ministers, probationers etc., who are members of the Circuit Meeting see S.O. 510(1)(i) and (ii).

(2) Persons on trial who are members in the Circuit are expected to attend but they are not entitled to vote. This clause takes effect with any modifications made under Standing Order 564B(2), where it applies. Such persons should normally remain during reports on services, discussions of such reports, and interviews, in order to benefit from the training opportunities afforded, but not when the meeting is considering or reaching any decision affecting the continuation or change of status of any local preacher or person on note or on trial, or any similar decision.

(3) The meeting shall be held at least once in every quarter.

(4) In this Section, unless the context otherwise requires, the word 'preacher' without qualification means a person who is a voting member of the relevant Local Preachers' Meeting.

(5) A Circuit may work together with one or more other Circuits in carrying out the functions given to the meeting and may make joint decisions accordingly, but the final authority of the Circuit Meeting as contained in this Section is not thereby affected.

(6) The meeting should invite others who contribute to worship in the Circuit (for example, church stewards, worship leaders, musicians, those who conduct reader services) to attend the meeting at appropriate times.

**561 Functions.**

The meeting shall:

(i) be an opportunity for all its members to worship together and share fellowship;

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- (ii) consider the state of the work of God in the Circuit so far as the role of local preachers and worship are concerned, and in particular communicate to the Superintendent its views on issues of policy affecting the circuit plan of preaching appointments and to the Circuit Meeting its views on circuit policy relating to worship;
- (iii) hold local preachers accountable for their ministry, considering in particular their character, their fidelity to doctrine and their fitness for the work;
- (iv) perform the functions prescribed by Standing Orders 563 to 568 and 680 to 685;
- (v) initiate and oversee a programme of continuing development so that the local preachers and others who contribute to worship in the Circuit may be the better equipped for their work;
- (vi) deal with the business in accordance with any guidelines approved from time to time by the Conference or issued by the Connexional Team.

For the jurisdiction of the meeting over lay employees see S.O. 570(7).

**562 Secretary.**

- (1) The meeting shall appoint one of its members as its secretary, who shall:
  - (i) record decisions, advice and recommendations of each meeting held;
  - (ii) carry out such functions in relation to the training and oversight of persons on note and on trial in accordance with guidance issued by the Connexional Team, as the Connexional Team may from time to time require;
  - (iii) ensure that appropriate pastoral care is provided for all local preachers (including persons on note or on trial);
  - (iv) help members of the meeting to obtain appropriate assistance and support, in conjunction with the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust;
  - (v) encourage members of the meeting to support local action and fund-raising for the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust.

The Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust was created in 2005 and is the successor body (meeting a wider range of need) to the Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association.

- (2) The meeting may appoint an assistant secretary to assist the secretary in such manner as the meeting may determine.

**563 Duties and Rights of Local Preachers.**

- (1) Preachers are called of God, to be worthy in character, to lead God's people in worship and to preach the gospel. This places duties on, and gives rights to, local preachers.
- (2) As to worship, it is the duty of local preachers:
  - (i) to lead worship and preach with knowledge, conviction and competence;
  - (ii) to preach nothing at variance with our doctrines (the term 'our doctrines' refers to those truths of salvation which are set forth in the Methodist doctrinal standards);
  - (iii) to be available for an appropriate number of appointments each quarter, having regard to the situation of the local preacher and of the Circuit;
  - (iv) to inform the Superintendent of any occasions on which they cannot be available for appointments on the forthcoming circuit plan;
  - (v) to fulfil all appointments given on the circuit plan;

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(vi) if unable to fulfil an appointment, to arrange for a suitable substitute, informing the Superintendent and a church steward of the Local Church concerned;

(vii) to take overall responsibility for an act of worship when appointed on the circuit plan;

(viii) to seek to work collaboratively with others in leading worship.

For the doctrinal standards see cl. 4 of the Deed of Union (Book II, Part 1).

For the circuit plan see S.O. 521.

(3) As to fellowship and training, it is the duty of local preachers:

(i) to attend the Local Preachers' Meeting on each occasion (or to tender an apology for absence to the secretary if unable to attend for good reason);

(ii) to continue to develop in their personal spiritual life, in knowledge and understanding, and in preaching and leading worship;

(iii) [...] to **regularly review their ministry and** to participate in a programme of continuing local preacher development **which reflects the guidelines annually produced by the Ministries Committee;**

(iv) to attend a class, housegroup, or similar fellowship group if possible;

**(v) to attend an annual Service of Reaffirmation of their call to preach.**

(4) As to membership of the Local Church, it is the duty of local preachers regularly to attend public worship (as appointments permit) and receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (normally in a Methodist church or an approved local ecumenical partnership).

(5) It is the right of local preachers:

(i) to retain local preacher status while they remain members of the Methodist Church (this right continues if they are no longer able to lead worship and preach by reason of age or infirmity, but is subject to Sections 113 to 115);

(ii) upon removal from one Circuit to another, upon production of a copy of the current circuit plan from their former Circuit, to be received in the new Circuit as local preachers;

(iii) to have the year of their admission as a local preacher recorded by the Circuit.

Sections 113 to 115 of Standing Orders, in Part 11 below, concern disciplinary proceedings.

As to transfers generally see S.O. 055.

**564 Candidates.**

Those who wish to train to become local preachers must be and remain members. They must in the first place be recommended to the Local Preachers' Meeting by the Church Council of the Local Church in which they are members, or by a presbyter, presbyteral probationer or local preacher present in the meeting. They should, before the meeting, have shared in an interview with the Superintendent, who should also have consulted as necessary with the candidate's Local Church and the presbyter having pastoral charge of that church in such manner as he or she thinks fit.

**564A Persons on Note.**

(1) Candidates approved by the meeting shall meet the Church's safeguarding requirements and shall then receive from the Superintendent a written note authorising them to assist a preacher in the conduct of services within the Circuit. The Superintendent shall make them aware of the duties placed on local preachers by Standing Order 563.

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(2) Where persons on note are primarily involved in a Circuit or Circuits other than that in which their membership is held, their note may be implemented and their initial training supervised in that other or one of those other Circuits (as the case requires) by mutual arrangement between the Local Preachers' Meetings of the Circuits concerned.

(2A) *[revoked]*

(3) Those on note shall follow a training programme approved by the Methodist Council in accordance with Standing Order 565 below. They shall be required to make a firm commitment to training and study.

(4) The written note shall be valid for three months and if it is deemed advisable may be renewed for a further such period or periods.

(5) Every person on note shall have a mentor, who must be a preacher, appointed to give oversight. The mentor, or another preacher, should be in charge of every service in which the person on note takes part and the mentor should continue to give oversight during the period on trial.

(6) Reports shall be submitted to the Local Preachers' Meeting by the mentor and any other preacher or preachers who have been present at any service in which the person on note has taken part. All formal reports shall use the report form provided by the Connexional Team. Those who are submitting a formal report to the Local Preachers' Meeting shall discuss the report with the person concerned before it is presented to the Local Preachers' Meeting.

(7) Before persons on note are passed to 'on trial' status by the Local Preachers' Meeting they shall conduct a full service on their own in the presence of two preachers, one of whom may be the mentor. The preachers shall present a report on the service and sermon, on the form provided by the Team, to the meeting. If that report and the report of the local tutor are satisfactory persons on note shall then be advanced by the meeting to the next stage of training, during which they are approved by the meeting to take responsibility for the conduct of worship and preaching and are said to be 'on trial'.

**564B Persons on Trial.**

(1) Before persons on trial are finally admitted as local preachers they shall have not less than one nor (subject to clause (3) below) more than five years on trial.

(1A) The Local Preachers' Meeting shall decide each quarter whether each of the persons on trial shall be continued in that status.

(2) Where persons on trial are primarily involved in a Circuit or Circuits other than that in which their membership is held, their training may be supervised in that other or one of those other Circuits (as the case requires) by mutual arrangements between the Local Preachers' Meetings of the Circuits concerned. The arrangements shall specify which Local Preachers' Meeting they are expected to attend.

(2A) *[revoked]*

(3) Applications to extend the period on trial beyond five years must be to the district Policy Committee. Such applications should be granted only in very exceptional circumstances. The Superintendent and the person on trial have the right to be present and to speak to the case.

(4) A person on trial who removes to a new Circuit shall be received as on trial in that Circuit and the Superintendent of the former Circuit shall report progress in the training programme and other relevant information.

As to the training programme see S.O. 565.

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(5) For at least the first six months of the period on trial services and sermons should be prepared in consultation with the mentor, who should be present at each service and give a report to the Local Preachers' Meeting. Thereafter, and until the final trial service, persons on trial shall each quarter conduct a service in the presence of at least one preacher, and a brief report of this service shall be presented to the next Local Preachers' Meeting.

For the final trial service see S.O. 566(4)(i).

(6) All reports on services conducted by persons on trial shall be discussed with the person concerned before being presented to the Local Preachers' Meeting.

**564C Local Tutorial Arrangements.**

(1) Every Local Preachers' Meeting shall appoint a local tutor, who shall oversee the studies of those on note and on trial in the Circuit and, by arrangement, those on note and on trial in any adjoining Circuits. Such appointments shall be notified to the Connexional Team. Every help possible shall be afforded to those on note and on trial in their studies and training.

(2) Where there are a number of persons on note and on trial the Local Preachers' Meeting may appoint a training sub-group to oversee their studies and receive the reports required under this Standing Order. If a sub-group is so appointed, the Local Preachers' Meeting may agree to receive the report of the sub-group in place of individual reports on each person on note or on trial.

(3) Where a person on note or on trial is undertaking a training programme supervised by a training institution approved for that purpose by the Methodist Council, the Local Preachers' Meeting may agree with the training institution that the institution will provide the mentor, tutor and reports to the meeting required under Standing Orders for or in respect of that person.

**565 Training Programmes.**

(1) Persons on trial shall, unless granted exemption under Standing Order 565B below, successfully complete the training programme prescribed by the Methodist Council or an alternative training programme validated in advance by the Methodist Council in accordance with Standing Order 565A.

S.O. 565A lays down the procedure for validation of an alternative course, enabling, where appropriate, approval in advance if a person is seeking to undertake that course. Where a person applies, on the basis of a course already undertaken, for exemption from some or all of the prescribed training course, S.O. 565B applies.

(2) The council may delegate some or all of its responsibilities under this Standing Order to a committee or member of the Connexional Team.

(3) The Circuit is responsible for enabling the reimbursement of local tutors and those on note and on trial for the cost of basic study material and registration fees.

(4) The training programme assessment results of persons on trial shall be reported to the Local Preachers' Meeting.

**565A Validation of Training Programmes.**

(1) All applications for validation of a training programme for the purposes of Standing Order 565(1) must be made to a validation panel, to be appointed by the Methodist Council, and shall be made by a person appointed for the purpose by the institution or body seeking validation of the particular training programme.

(2) The application for validation must include full details of course content, learning

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methods employed and the methods and criteria for assessment.

(3) The validation panel may grant validation if it is satisfied that:

- (i) the training programme meets the council's training specification; and
- (ii) appropriate arrangements have been agreed for the periodic inspection and review of the training programme to ensure it continues to meet the council's training specification.

(4) Validation may be withdrawn if it appears to the panel upon such inspection and review that the council's training specification is not being met. All reasonable steps shall be taken by the panel to assist any person affected by such withdrawal to complete his or her training by other means.

(5) Any institution or body seeking validation for any training programme shall pay to the council the prescribed fee to meet the costs of the validation process (whether or not the application for validation is successful).

An application for validation is to be made where it is proposed, under Standing Order 565(1), that a course other than the prescribed local preachers' training course be approved as suitable to be undertaken instead of that course.

**565B Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning.**

It is general policy that the interests of local preaching are best served if all those who wish to become local preachers follow a programme prescribed or validated in advance by the Methodist Council. However, in very exceptional circumstances, for example if another comparable training course has been undertaken and successfully completed, total or partial exemption from the prescribed training programme may be granted by the council at its discretion after consideration of the following material:

- (i) a completed application form, obtained from the Connexional Team;
- (ii) a detailed reasoned statement, approved by the Local Preachers' Meeting, in support of the application;
- (iii) any additional evidence required by the council.

**566 Admission Procedure.**

(1) Before persons on trial are recommended for admission as local preachers they must successfully complete two circuit interviews. The first interview shall be held after the person on trial has successfully completed at least half the training programme. The second interview shall be held after the person on trial has successfully completed the entire training programme. In cases where prior experience and learning have been accredited by the Methodist Council under Standing Order 565B, the timing of the interviews shall be at the discretion of the Local Preachers' Meeting.

(2) The interviews referred to in clause (1) above shall be conducted either by the Superintendent or (at his or her request) by other preachers at the Local Preachers' Meeting. The local tutor or the person's mentor would each be appropriate people to conduct the interviews. For each interview guidelines from the Connexional Team shall be supplied by the circuit Local Preachers' Secretary to the person on trial, the Superintendent and the interviewer.

(3) For the purposes of the first interview persons on trial:

- (i) shall, during the quarter preceding the interview, conduct a full service in the presence of two preachers and a church steward who is not a local preacher, who shall together prepare a report for the meeting, written on the form provided by the Team;

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- (ii) shall have the opportunity to share the story of their Christian experience; their call to preach; and any insights, challenges or difficulties experienced during the period on trial to date.
- (4) For the purposes of the second interview the person on trial:
- (i) shall, during the quarter preceding the interview, conduct a full service in the presence of two preachers (one of whom should under normal circumstances be a presbyter) and a church steward who is not a local preacher, who shall together prepare a report for the meeting, written on the form provided by the Connexional Team;
  - (ii) shall have the opportunity to speak of his or her growth in knowledge and understanding of the faith, and maturing of Christian experience;
  - (iii) must satisfy the meeting that he or she is faithful to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith and to Methodist doctrinal standards;
  - (iv) must assure the meeting that he or she will accept and observe the duties of a local preacher as described in Standing Order 563(1)–(4), which may, for this purpose, be read at the meeting.
- (5) If, after this second interview, the meeting is satisfied that the person on trial should be admitted as a local preacher it shall so recommend to the Circuit Meeting which, if it agrees, shall approve the person on trial for admission as a local preacher.
- (6) After being approved under clause (5) above the person on trial shall be admitted as a local preacher at a public religious service to be arranged by the Circuit Meeting. At that service a letter and Bible signed by the President and Vice-President of the Conference shall be presented to each local preacher so admitted.
- (7) Local preachers, before or soon after being admitted, shall be encouraged to proceed to an induction course.
- (8) The names of local preachers who are members in the Circuit or are deacons or diaconal probationers who are members of the Circuit Meeting shall appear in the list of local preachers in the circuit plan with their year of admission as a local preacher.

**566A Preachers and Readers from Other Churches who have become Members.**

- (1) Local Preachers' Meetings can recommend to the Circuit Meeting that it approve the admission as local preachers of lay preachers and readers of other churches (including officers of the Salvation Army) who have become members of the Methodist Church, provided the training procedures they have undergone meet the Methodist Council's training specification. Before recommending admission the Local Preachers' Meeting must satisfy itself on the following points:
- (i) the standing of the candidate in the other church;
  - (ii) that its training procedure was successfully completed, as to which, if possible, written evidence shall be required;
  - (iii) that satisfactory information has been obtained on the circumstances in which the candidate may have ceased to be a preacher in the other church (if that is the case);
  - (iv) that the candidate will not preach anything at variance with our doctrines;
  - (v) that the candidate satisfies the safeguarding requirements of the Methodist Church;
  - (vi) that the candidate is known to other members of the meeting who can support the application to become a local preacher.
- (2) Pending a decision of the Circuit Meeting on a recommendation made under clause (1)

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above candidates may at the discretion of the Local Preachers' Meeting be granted 'on trial' status, but they shall be subject to the requirements of this clause and clauses (1) above and (3) below in place of those of Standing Orders 564A(7), 564B, 565 and 566(1) to (4) above.

(3) In every case there shall be a conversation at the Local Preachers' Meeting conducted by the Superintendent or a preacher appointed by him or her to satisfy the meeting on the points referred to in clause (1) above. In particular the candidate shall have read *A Catechism for the use of the People called Methodists* and this document should form the basis of the conversation.

(4) Any person approved by the Circuit Meeting under clause (1) above shall be admitted as a local preacher at a public religious service to be arranged by the Circuit Meeting and Standing Order 566(6) and (7) above shall apply.

As to lay preachers and readers who do not become members of the Methodist Church see S.O. 566B.

**566B Preachers and Readers of Other Churches.**

(1) Where there is a local ecumenical partnership scheme approved by the Conference or (if so empowered) by the Synod any lay preacher or reader of another church participating in the scheme who has not become a member of the Methodist Church may apply to be authorised to serve as a local preacher in accordance with this clause, and in that event the following provisions shall apply:

- (i) the application shall be considered by the Local Preachers' Meeting;
- (ii) the training procedures undergone by the applicant must meet the Methodist Council's training specification;
- (iii) the meeting must be assured that the applicant will not preach anything at variance with our doctrines;
- (iv) the candidate must satisfy the safeguarding requirements of the Methodist Church;
- (v) if satisfied as to (ii), (iii) and (iv) above the meeting may recommend to the Circuit Meeting the acceptance of the application and the Circuit Meeting, if it approves, shall authorise the applicant to serve as a local preacher in the Circuit, subject to and in accordance with this clause;
- (vi) persons so authorised are members of the Local Preachers' Meeting and shall be subject to the duties of a local preacher as set out in Standing Order 563(1)–(4), and their names shall appear in the circuit plan;
- (vii) Part 11, so far as it relates to local preachers, shall apply to such persons, but so as to affect only their status under this clause in relation to the Methodist Church;
- (viii) Standing Order 563(5) shall not apply to such persons and their authorisation in a Circuit shall cease if they remove, or cease to have authority to preach in their own church, or if their church or the Methodist Church ceases to participate in the partnership scheme, but without prejudice to further applications under this clause or clause (2) below.

As to lay preachers and readers of other churches who become members of the Methodist Church see S.O. 566A above. See cl. (2) below for those who may be authorised to serve in circumstances where no partnership scheme exists.

(2) An accredited lay preacher or reader of another church recognised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland who is neither a member of the Methodist Church nor within

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the scope of clause (1) above, but who is available for regular appointments on a circuit plan, may apply to be authorised to serve as a local preacher.

(3) Where an application is made under clause (2) above, the provisions of clause (1) above apply except that the authorisation of such persons in a Circuit shall cease if they remove, or cease to have authority to preach in their own church, or cease to be available for regular appointments on the circuit plan, but without prejudice to further applications under this clause or clause (1).

As to lay preachers and readers of other churches who become members of the Methodist Church see S.O. 566A above.

**567 Accountability and Review.**

(1) Local preachers shall be held accountable to the Local Preachers' Meeting for their ministry, their character, their fidelity to doctrine and their fitness for the work by reference to the respective duties set out in Standing Order 563 above and any further material specified by the Connexional Team.

(2) If a question or concern is raised about the conduct of a local preacher, or if a complaint within the meaning of Part 11 is made about any member of the meeting, the provisions of that Part apply.

***(2A) A local preacher found by the meeting to be unable or unwilling to fulfil the duties set out in Standing Order 563 shall not be planned to preach. Any local preachers unavailable for that reason to be planned shall be identified in the circuit plan, either by a mark in the full list of preachers or in a separate list. The meeting shall regularly review their status in that regard.***

(3) Subject to clause (2) above, if a question or concern is raised about the fidelity to doctrine of a local preacher or his or her fitness for the work (including his or her calling, commitment to fulfil his or her duties or his or her competence as a local preacher) the meeting shall follow the guidelines for such circumstances produced by the Connexional Team. The guidelines shall include guidance on the circumstances in which Part 11 applies ***and on the operation of clause (2A) above.***

(4) Questions or concerns about the fidelity to doctrine of a person on note or on trial or his or her fitness for the work (including the matters specified in clause (3) above) shall be addressed by the meeting as part of the training process.

**568 Reinstatement.**

(1) Unless Standing Order 761(14) applies, a former local preacher who is a member may be reinstated as a local preacher with the approval of the Circuit Meeting of the Circuit in which he or she is a member on the recommendation of the Local Preachers' Meeting.

S.O. 761(14) concerns the reinstatement as local preachers of former presbyters and deacons.

(2) Before recommending reinstatement the meeting shall:

(i) carefully consider the circumstances in which the applicant ceased to be a local preacher and in all cases where an applicant ceased to be a local preacher as a result of a decision of a connexional Discipline Committee or Appeal Committee or the Conference under Part 11 or any previous Standing Orders relating to complaints and discipline, the Chair of the relevant District or the Secretary of the Conference (as the case may require) shall be consulted before the applicant is reinstated;

(ii) make such enquiries as it thinks fit;

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- (iii) if the applicant was formerly a local preacher in another Circuit, obtain information, if possible in writing, from the current Superintendent of that Circuit;
  - (iv) conduct such examination of the applicant as it thinks fit;
  - (v) require such refresher study as it deems necessary.
- (3) Pending a decision of the Circuit Meeting applicants may at the discretion of the Local Preachers' Meeting be granted 'on trial' status, but they shall be subject to the requirements of this clause in place of those of Standing Orders 564A(7), 564B, 565, and 566(1)–(4).
- (4) Persons formerly on note or on trial who are members may be reinstated to their former status by the Local Preachers' Meeting after enquiry and examination similar to that in clause (2) above.

**569 Services not led by a Presbyter or Local Preacher.**

- (1) A service described on the preaching plan by the words 'Local Arrangements' or any similar expression shall be arranged by church stewards and led by persons from the local congregation and shall not normally include a preaching element. Local preachers and worship leaders may be invited to take part in such a service but are neither required nor expected to do so and are free to decline any request to participate.
- (2) Those responsible for a local arrangements service by and for a particular group (such as children, young people, elderly people or those with special educational needs) shall receive encouragement and guidance from persons working with the group and an appropriate member of the Local Preachers' Meeting. The service should enable members of the group to discover and develop creative and culturally appropriate ways for them to meet with God in worship.