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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2019 Methodist Conference

The 2019 Methodist Conference,
Hilton Metropole Hotel, Birmingham:
Presbyteral Session 27 – 28 June;
Representative Session 29 June – 4 July.
www.methodist.org.uk/conference2019/

Presidential addresses

The Revd Dr Barbara Glasson was inducted as President and Prof Clive Marsh as Vice-President of the Conference. ‘So What’s the Story...?’ was the theme chosen by the President for her address, with the Vice-President exploring ‘Pleasure, piety and politics’ in his address.

- You can read the President’s address in full here:

bit.ly/PresAddress19

- You can read the Vice-President's address in full here:

bit.ly/VPAddress19

Ordinations of presbyters and deacons

Twenty-two presbyters and four deacons were received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning during Conference Worship, along with seven presbyters by transfer, and one by reinstatement. Later that day ordination services took place in four venues across the region.

The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order

The Conference adopted this major report brought by the Faith and Order Committee. The report emphasises that deacons are ministers of the Church, focusing and representing a ministry of witness and service. The Conference reaffirmed that the Methodist Diaconal Order is a religious order open only to those who are deacons in Full Connexion with the Conference and that all Methodist deacons are also required to be members of the Methodist Diaconal Order. The report explored the broad ministry of proclamation as it is exercised by deacons

and affirmed that preaching is part of the ministry of deacons, making proposals for how that will be worked out in practice.

Connexional finances and allowances

The Conference received the Statement of Connexional Finances for 2017/2018 and adopted the Connexional Central Services Budget for three years commencing with 2019/2020, which covers all planned income to, and expenditure from, the connexionally-held funds that are administered via the Methodist Council. The budget for income in 2019/2020 is £36.2m and the expenditure £41.2m, a net deficit of over £5m. This reflects a deliberate policy of reducing reserves on some funds by releasing additional amounts for grants.

The Methodist Church Fund assessment for 2019/2020 is budgeted at £13.7m, in line with a previous decision to restrict increases to 1% per annum. The Conference further agreed to restrict increases for the three years commencing September 2020 to a fixed amount of 1% per annum.

Using the formula agreed by the Conference, the level of increase in the standard stipend will be 2.8% to £24,852.

The Conference considered a review of the preaching fee for supernumerary presbyters, agreeing that the fee should be retained for the foreseeable future (remaining at £25 for two years until August 2021, at which point the amount will be reviewed). Further to the report concerning the preaching ministry of deacons, the Conference agreed that the preaching fee should also be applicable to supernumerary deacons with effect from September 2020.

3Generate

Jasmine Yeboah, Youth President, reflected on her presidential theme, encouraging young people to step outside of their comfort zone to do something courageous for Christ. In an address to the Conference, Jasmine spoke of the priority for the Church to listen to the voices of children and young people. A manifesto has been developed which includes taking action on homelessness, building relationships within communities, supporting the lonely, caring for the environment, creating safe spaces for people to listen to each other and being creative in worship. The Conference urged Local Churches actively to engage with the 3Generate

manifesto, by including it on Church Council agendas and committing to intentional actions as a response.

The manifesto is available at

www.methodist.org.uk/3genmanifestos

The Methodist Council

The Council is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to advise on changes to make the work of the Church more effective, and to give it spiritual leadership. Along with other matters detailed in this Digest, the Council reported to the Conference and received its approval as necessary for the following:

- the adoption of a connexional financial strategy and a connexional property strategy (available for download from www.methodist.org.uk/property);
- a change in focus for the work of One Mission from a connexional Forum to connexional support for events in Districts which will enable a broader engagement with One Mission thinking, resources and inspiration more locally;

- an encouragement to churches to increase their awareness of human trafficking and what they can do to prevent it.

The Conference received a report from the Council in relation to practical strategies for implementing a connexional approach to vocations. The Conference also accepted a memorial from the Bolton and Rochdale District which requested that the relevant officers be given the resources and time to explore this area as a matter of urgency. The Conference heard from the Secretary of the Conference, who emphasised the importance of vocational conversations and the need for boldness in talking with others about the call that God places upon our lives.

The Conference agreed to create a Global Relationships Committee, to be appointed by the Council who will also set its terms of reference. The Committee will advise and support the Connexional Team in overseeing the implementation, development and monitoring of the strategy of expressing One Mission through our global relationships.

Reaffirming *Our Calling*

The Conference received a report celebrating some of the ways in which the reaffirmation of *Our Calling* has shaped the life and work of the Methodist Church during the 2018/2019 connexional year. The Conference explored in workshops the implications for the Church of this renewed focus on *Our Calling* by reimagining structures of decision-making and the developing of an emerging strategy of evangelism and growth.

Action for Children

The Deputy Chief Executive of Action for Children made a striking presentation to the Conference, marking the 150th year of the charity's support for children, young people and families. In response, the Conference encouraged all Methodists to write to their local MPs to express their concerns about the ongoing plight of children in the UK.

Marriage and Relationships

Following debates held on Monday 1 July and Wednesday 3 July, the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group was commended to the Connexion for study and prayerful discussion.

Provisional resolutions were passed on the qualities of good relating, an understanding of cohabitation, celebration of civil partnerships, prayers following the end of a marriage and permission for same-sex marriages to take place in Methodist Churches. These will be voted on by District Synods during the year, and a report will be brought to the 2020 Conference based on those responses. A clause has been included in the proposals that no one would have to officiate at a same-sex marriage if they feel prevented by their conscience. Resources will be available (by emailing MandR@methodistchurch.org.uk) for churches to facilitate discussion of the report.

Housing and Homelessness

The Conference received a report setting out the actions taken since the 2018 Conference expressed its concern about the crisis in housing and homelessness. The Conference commended the work being taken by churches and communities across the Connexion to support people experiencing homelessness and to provide housing and combat the housing crisis. The Conference agreed to encourage Circuits and Districts to consider increasing the social impact of property in local

mission and how property might play a part in a holistic housing strategy of reduction, respite, recovery and reconnection. The Conference urged Her Majesty's Government to accelerate its targets to eliminate rough sleeping, allow local authorities to build more housing and to enable the building of more genuinely affordable homes as a means of building stronger and more cohesive communities.

Climate Emergency

In 2011, the Conference adopted *Hope in God's Future*, which set out a Methodist understanding of the challenges facing our global ecology and the theological and ethical implications, as a Statement of the Judgment of the Conference. The Conference heard that since then, both the scientific evidence and the global ambition for action have developed further. The Council reported to the Conference that it had endorsed proposals for the development of Eco Circuits and Eco Districts along with the Eco Church awards.

The Conference received a memorial from the Bristol District, which highlighted the need for urgent action on climate change. Recognising the climate

emergency, the Conference endorsed the need for urgent action. The Conference also adopted a notice of motion concerned with reducing the use of plastic.

The Unfinished Agenda

The Conference spent some time discussing matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The Council reported on the EDI Symposium which had taken place in March 2019, and the work still to be done to increase participation and inclusion.

Concerns were expressed about procedures relating to incidents of hate or unlawful discrimination and the ways in which EDI issues are dealt with in stationing processes. These will be discussed by the Methodist Council in the year ahead.

Memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion. This year the Conference considered and replied to 56 Memorials on topics including: safeguarding training, marriage and relationships, Israel/Palestine and a proposal for a year of prayer.

Notices of Motion

The Conference debated and adopted a variety of Notices of Motion (items of business put forward during the Conference) including: the role of the Youth President, reviewing the complaints and discipline processes and support for refugees including support for the Lift the Ban campaign which seeks to make it possible for those seeking asylum to work.

The 2020/2021 President and Vice-President

The Conference designated the Revd Richard Teal to be President and Mrs Carolyn Lawrence to be Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2020/2021.

Appointments

The Conference appointed the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler as Secretary of the Conference and the Revd Ruth M Gee as Assistant Secretary for the connexional year 2019/2020.

These appointments will enable the Council to oversee a process of discernment during the ensuing connexional year, and to bring nominations for new

appointments to the 2020 Conference.

The Conference appointed the Revd Dr David Hinchliffe as Chair for the South East District from 1 September 2019 and the Revd Dr James N Tebbutt as Chair for the Cumbria District from 1 September 2019.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Telford from 25 June – 2 July 2020 and in Birmingham from 24 June – 1 July 2021.