

Reaffirming *Our Calling*: The Next Steps

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Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To share with the Council the Connexional Leaders' Forum's (CLF) reflections on structure and principles identified for moving forward; To invite the Council to use these principles to produce a model for a new structure.
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1. The 2019 Conference received a report showing a number of developments in reaffirming *Our Calling* (see Agenda item 16 *Developments in Reaffirming Our Calling*). One particular area of importance discussed in the report at paragraph 23 concerns "oversight and trusteeship, considering structures with the aim of providing greater support; enabling ministry, mission and broader strategic thinking; and promoting better coordination."
2. Both the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Council have had discussions on the size and nature of decision-making within the Church over the past connexional year. Workshops were held at the Conference which further explored what changes might be considered, where there was a strong recognition that a change is needed. During these workshops topics that were frequently raised were:
 - Geography - issues surrounding travel and the effect on carbon footprint/ climate change etc. With today's technology we could have bigger Districts, if we learnt to be more coherent and function better with the use of skype, live streaming etc.
 - The suggestion of having a smaller Conference was met with a mixed response. It would reduce costs, could move around the Connexion more, and engage with Circuits and the local church more. It could be more streamlined in its work and decision-making, although there is a need to ensure diversity is met and the responsibility on those members is not too great.
 - An important question to be considered throughout the process is, "Where is the local church?"
3. The Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF) spent a great deal of time reflecting on this subject at its meeting in September 2019. This report shares with the Council the briefing information that the CLF was asked to reflect on, and the principles the CLF has identified for moving forward. The Council will be asked to develop models for our future structure that incorporate these principles.

Discussions on Structure – background shared with the CLF

4. This is not the first attempt to have conversations about the structures that embody the oversight of the Methodist Church, or the roles that are required to populate that oversight. Whilst we have not stood still over the last decades there has been little change in the basic structural patterns which were created as a result of Methodist Union and then again the Methodist Church Act 1976; the same cannot be said for the overall life of the Connexion and wider society.
5. Part of the reaffirmation of *Our Calling* is to ensure our structures are those that best enable the mission and calling of the Methodist Church to be fulfilled. We continue to hear how we are increasingly under pressure with our human and financial resources being stretched.

6. Furthermore, the 2014 report reviewing the role of the General Secretary/Secretary of the Conference touched upon the urgent need to change the ways of working of the Conference and that review should take place.
7. A review of the size of the Conference is now due (the last one was in 2013). The last major change to composition of Conference membership took place over a decade ago in 2008 when the size of the Church put us in a different place from that in which we find ourselves today.

Number of Districts

8. The last time the number and size of Districts was revised was in 1957, where the Districts were structured using approximately 30,000 members per separated Chair. However, when considering that there were 742,444 members in 1957, applying the 30,000 'formula' results in a total of just under 25 Districts (there were actually 34). It should be borne in mind that such a rubric was used as an approximation, and that geographic and other factors must be considered when determining how Districts should be constituted.
9. If one was to use the '30,000 members per District' formula today, using the last official membership count in 2017, this would result in just over 6 Districts. If 30,000 members per District is now felt to be too high, reducing the formula to 20,000 per District results in 9.4 districts. If it was to be further reduced to 15,000 per District the result is 12.53 Districts (under half of the 30 that currently exist). The table below illustrates these comparisons:

Year	Total Members	Formula	Number of Districts (applying formula)	Number of Districts (actual)
1957	742,444	30,000 per District	24.75	34
2017	188,000	30,000 per District	6.27	30
If the formula was reduced to 20,000 or 10,000 per District...				
2017	188,000	20,000 per District	9.4	30
2017	188,000	15,000 per District	12.53	30

10. A need for change is even more evident when considering membership per District. Looking at the 2017 statistics (see table in Appendix 1 below), only three Districts have membership over 10,000.
11. The average (mean) members per District is 6,263, the median is 6,732. While the large numbers in London and smaller ones in the island Districts should be borne in mind when calculating averages, this further supports the fact that our district structures need some urgent consideration.
12. In the last few years the demands being made on many parts of the Church to comply with state legislation has made it more onerous for many Circuits and Districts to keep up with the administration required. We have seen a significant increase in workload required for safeguarding, data protection, property and charity regulation, which places more and more demands on our people.
13. This has had the result of the emergence of innovative ways of sharing that burden amongst a shrinking resource base. In other places it has proved more difficult to be creative and innovative in response to growing legislation and compliance issues.
14. The CLF has previously noted that the question of the number of Districts is linked to a reflection on the nature and role of the number of District Chairs or the personnel that may be needed to support them in their work, whilst not necessarily being the same issue.

District Reviews

15. The 2016 Conference directed the Council to bring a process for implementing District Reviews. The Conference directed that such a review would be initiated when a new Chair is being sought, or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a reinvention, or a District (or group of Districts) wishes to engage in the process of reflection or review. It would oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in its wider connexional and ecumenical context. The proposed outline in MC/18/6 was that each District should undertake a review every three to five years. Therefore, all Districts should be reviewed by 2023.
16. The Council agreed to recommend an outline District Review process, as set out in MC/18/6, to the Conference and directed the Connexional Team to ensure that the process is regularly reviewed as part of the ongoing work to support the development of district mission plans.
17. The number of Districts impacts directly on the size of the Conference and the required number of bodies operating with delegations in place of or on behalf of the Conference (ie the Methodist Council). The size and number of these bodies raises issues about our understanding of representation and trust. At the same time a common refrain heard at various levels of connexional life is how difficult it is to find volunteers to take on the various roles that our current structures require.
18. Having run a number of pilots of District Reviews it now feels necessary to adopt a more connexional approach to these reviews which will enable wider conversations about the future. Further work will therefore be brought to the Council in January which will enable this to progress.

Size of the Conference

19. Standing Order 100 sets the current size of the Conference at 306 members. The number of district representatives to the Conference is calculated by deducting the number of ex-officio members prescribed in Standing Orders (usually between 81-85 as some may hold dual office). The Secretary of the Conference then ensures that the number of representatives allocated to each District is proportionate to the number of members within, also ensuring the numbers of presbyters and deacons meet requirements laid out in Standing Orders.
20. In 2019, with the exception of the London District (which had 20 representatives), the 30 Districts had between 12 and 2 Conference representatives according to the proportion of members from within. The average number of representatives per District is 7.5 (mean) or 8 (median).
21. If the number of Districts was reduced on a formula of 15,000 members per District, with Conference membership set at 306, the 12 Districts would have on average 17 representatives each, which could be argued to be too many.
22. Having 12 Districts with an average of 8 representatives each would give a total of 96 District representatives. Any decision to reduce the number of district representatives would also necessitate a review of the number of ex-officio Conference members to ensure representation across the Connexion is sufficiently balanced and at a suitable ratio.
23. Similarly, the numbers of presbyters and deacons would also need to be reviewed in the light of the overall size of the Conference. Membership of the Methodist Council would need to be considered in the same way.

Size of the Methodist Council

24. SO 210 sets out the membership of the Council, with 29 'ex-officio' voting members of the Council, as well as 30 District representative (1 representative per District), giving a maximum total of 59 voting members.
25. Currently, there are 55 voting members of the Council. The ratio between the maximum 'ex-officio' and District representatives is almost 50% each. Any reduction in the number of Districts (and therefore district representatives) should be accompanied by a consideration of the number of 'ex-officio' voting members.

CLF Discussion and Comments

26. Having read this background information, the CLF was invited to come to the meeting with some responses to the following questions:

What are the missional imperatives and principles that will shape the district and connexional Structure?

- *What is the organisational structure that is needed to enable this to happen?*
- *How do we obtain effective decision making bodies at each level?*
- *What do we no longer need to do?*
- *What is being done that can't be done any other way?*
- *What doesn't need to be done connexionally because it is being done at a local level?*

What does the process look like for implementing these ideas?

- *What would the timeline look like to achieve this work?*

27. The CLF then spent time in detailed conversation and reflection on: the evangelism and growth strategy; the next steps for our governance; the things we no longer need to be doing; the nature of how we confer together; and finally thinking about the next steps and identifying principles for moving forward.
28. During the discussion the following themes and comments emerged:
 - Evangelism:
 - Nothing should distract us from the evangelism and growth agenda.
 - This must be about making and nurturing disciples, not saving the church.
 - Reflect the principles in God for All (Evangelism & Growth strategy).
 - Streamlined structures:
 - Exodus 18:13-23 shows us how Moses was encouraged to delegate and share the load – for us today this could be Chairs and Deputy Chairs.
 - New Testament principles in Acts and how the local churches were resourced - they did not gather disparate communities (other than the 'overseers') but they were connected, so we might need to consider what Synods are for?
 - If structures were to be simplified and streamlined then we could operate with say 12 Districts.
 - Shift of executive power to those in regional leadership (as in Irish model)
 - New/altered Districts should be based on models that work (look at ecumenical partners, secular boundaries etc.)
 - If we streamline the Conference and the Council should we not also streamline District Policy Committees?
 - If we had fewer Districts and the Council was therefore smaller, could we dispense with eg the CLF and have one less body/meeting to attend?
 - Wales and Scotland Districts should remain because of the devolved nature of the country.

- We will still have Districts of varying sizes and identities
- Could we imagine our island districts with a Deputy Chair (as in the Scotland/Shetland model)
- Within Districts:
 - A Chair overseeing and two or three Deputy Chairs overseeing either geographical areas or specific ministries such as pastoral care, stationing, mission, property, admin etc.
 - Money should be allocated for the Chair to be able to devolve to professional managers eg for finance, property, safeguarding etc, thus freeing up their time for ministers to focus more on worship and mission.
 - Have the optimum number of 'reports' for a leader to effectively manage or relate to (not basing structures on members per district)
 - Lay people need to understand why this is being done and to "own" it (many now are not cradle Methodists and do not understand/engage with our structures beyond the local congregation)
 - Lack of abilities/willingness of many lay folk who shrink back from larger responsibilities over wider areas. This may mean paid roles rather than gifted time as part of discipleship.

Principles and timeframe for moving forward

29. At the conclusion of the gathering, the CLF considered what the next steps should be with principles in three key areas emerging:

Re-imagining Leadership - Principles

- *Oversight in leadership has to be different than it is now - it should be shared - new model needs to developed*
- *Leadership needs to model lay and ordained working collegially*
- *Leadership must connect responsibility and authority*

Reconfiguring Districts - Principles

- *Re-imagined districts must serve the reaffirming of Our Calling*
- *All Districts need to be reviewed*
- *The new structure is not simply combining existing Districts*

Re-shaping Governance - Principles

- *Governance needs to be as simple as possible with minimal duplication*
- *Governance must serve the 'God for All' strategy*
- *Governance bodies (and leadership) must be representative of our diversity (more so than at present)*

30. The CLF wishes to stress that care must be taken to ensure that any work on restructuring will not stop the focus and momentum towards evangelism and growth across the Connexion.
31. It is also important to stress that early indications of work in progress to review trusteeship has shown that the membership of both the Conference and the Council is far too high compared to what the Charity Governance Code sets as good practice for national organisations, and this must be addressed as this work progresses.
32. The importance of reaffirming *Our Calling* means that there is little desire for a drawn out reflection on the process, but that any changes would be seen to be ones that could be consulted on and adopted in expediently so as not to distract from the vital work before us.
33. The Council is invited to take these principles to model a new structure. The following timeline for implementation is suggested:

- *October 2019 – the Council develops models*
- *Models synthesised following the Council and shared back to members*
- *Council representative report back to sending bodies who engage with proposals*
- *January 2020 - The Council agrees models to send to the Conference along with an implementation timeline and a district review process which supports this (outlining the implications for future appointments)*
- *July 2020 – the Conference is asked to make decisions on which model best supports Our Calling for the future. This should include:*
 - *A smaller Conference and Council*
 - *Reduced committee and trustee structures*
 - *Reconfigured Districts*
- *2020-23/24/25 – implementation*

Appendix 1

District Membership Statistics Summary October 2017

District No.	District name	Methodist Membership	Methodists in LEPs	Total Methodist Membership
35	London	17,333	441	17,774
27	Yorkshire West	10,048	819	10,867
23	Northampton	9,464	547	10,011
36	South East	8,964	665	9,629
29	Yorkshire North and East	8,177	400	8,577
26	Southampton	7,689	295	7,984
22	Nottingham and Derby	7,525	365	7,890
28	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	7,319	239	7,558
5	Birmingham	7,247	161	7,408
24	Plymouth and Exeter	6,853	528	7,381
7	Bristol	6,860	473	7,333
34	Beds, Essex, Herts	6,954	293	7,247
19	Manchester and Stockport	6,903	268	7,171
11	Chester and Stoke-on-Trent	6,781	120	6,901
20	Newcastle upon Tyne	6,545	337	6,882
21	Lancashire	6,441	141	6,582
2	Wales Synod	6,071	462	6,533
25	Sheffield	5,960	359	6,319
14	East Anglia	5,946	313	6,259
12	Cornwall	5,346	84	5,430
13	Darlington	4,819	61	4,880
18	Liverpool	4,400	159	4,559
6	Bolton & Rochdale	4,385	109	4,494
17	Lincolnshire	4,119	117	4,236
9	Cumbria	2,890	136	3,026
31	Scotland	1,746	32	1,778
1	Synod Cymru	1,057	50	1,107
10	Channel Islands	1,036	0	1,036
15	Isle of Man	864	0	864
32	Shetland	184	0	184
	Totals	179,926	7,974	187,900
	Average (mean) membership per District			6,263
	Median membership per District			6,732