

The Inclusive Methodist Church

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Resolutions	<p>51/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>51/2. The Council affirms the statement, 'The Inclusive Methodist Church'.</p> <p>51/3. The Council directs that further work be done by the task group to implement the five 'workstreams'.</p> <p>51/4. The Council thanks the EDI Committee for its work.</p> <p>51/5. The Council agrees the disbandment of the EDI Committee and mandates the Secretary of the Conference to oversee work to ensure that the EDI Adviser has access to a community of expertise to implement and embed the 'Inclusive Methodist Church' model and to report to the next meeting of the Council.</p> <p>51/6. In considering resolution 51/5, the Council recommends to the Conference the deletion of SO 336 and changes to related Standing Orders.</p>

Introduction and Background

The EDI Task Group has consulted across the Connexion and with partners in the preparation of the attached paper, Towards an Inclusive Methodist Church.

The Council received the report of the EDI Task Group (MC/19/87) at its meeting in October 2019. This paper indicates the development of the thinking outlined in that report and offers recommendations about the shape of future work.

The EDI Task Group acknowledges the valuable work of the EDI Committee over the past six years and the foundations laid upon which the implementation and embedding of the 'Inclusive Methodist Church' will rest.

Towards an Inclusive Methodist Church

Background:

The Methodist Church has had a long history of being an advocate for social justice and challenging the evil of injustice. In the modern era, work on gender justice was first brought to the Wesleyan Conference in 1928, and the first women presbyters were ordained in 1974, a year before the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Work on racial justice was brought to the Conference in 1962, long before the Government's introduction of the Race Relations Act (1976). These two examples echo the work of Wesley and the early Methodists who recognised the preaching ministry of women and campaigned against slavery and extreme poverty. Underpinning all this work is our firm belief that all are created in God's image and, in Christ Jesus, are called to be one.

Following on from those ground breaking pieces of work, as a Church, we have made significant progress in understanding the nature of discrimination and the need to work for equality for all with 'protected characteristics' (as stated under the Equalities Act 2010). However, we recognise that there is still much to do and that discrimination based on race, sexuality, gender and disability is still a major challenge within the Church as well as wider society. Any serious attempt to become an "Inclusive Church" will result in significant transformation of our structures, policies and organizational culture, as well as in individual attitudes and behaviour.

The Methodist Council has recognised that Equality Diversity and Inclusion must move beyond being “one of many priorities competing for scarce resources and finance”, to being viewed as an essential and integral part of the Church’s life and mission. The themes of EDI will be embedded in every area of the Church across the Connexion.

In ‘A Theology of Good Intentions’ (Professor Anthony Reddie, *Nobodies to Somebodies* Epworth Press, 2003), Professor Reddie focuses on ways in which ‘Apologetic Rhetoric’ becomes the means by which the Church can at times resist any significant attempts to institute justice in the life of the church. Re-defining the norm is necessary if the Methodist Church is going to develop a means of moving beyond the rhetoric of apology into a more determined and intentional mode of challenging injustice, be it on the grounds of ‘race’, gender, sexuality or disability and be a site for equity and full inclusion as it hopes and believes itself to be.

Inclusive Church Definition: The definition presented below is broadly the same as had been presented to the Methodist Council previously, with the addition of ‘sanctions’ in point 2.

The Inclusive Methodist Church:

1. Welcomes in safety all who wish to be part of the life of the Church whether through worship, learning and caring, service or evangelism. In creating places of acceptance for all, no-one should feel any less welcome than anyone else on account of their age, social or economic class, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic.
2. Upholds the discipline of the Methodist Church in the face of discrimination. Rejecting and resisting all behaviours which are discriminatory or belittling. All unacceptable behaviours and attitudes must be challenged quickly and could lead to sanctions, including the right to hold office or membership in the Church being withdrawn. Support of the victimised and protection from further harm in these situations must always be paramount.
3. Celebrates diversity in the variety of God’s creation, a reflection of the life-giving relationship of diversity and unity seen most fully in the Triune heart of God. Only when worship and service, and life and mission include fully the contributions and participation of those of different backgrounds and abilities, will it truly bring glory to God.
4. Represents the diversity of the Methodist Church throughout its life and structures and affirms that there is no place for discrimination in our processes of selection, discernment and appointment. The leadership will therefore reflect the diversity of its membership and the wider community, and the Church must embrace honesty, openness and transparency as expressions of the truth that sets us free to ensure full participation in decision-making at every level of the Church’s structures.

We will achieve this by implementing the following workstreams:

- A. **Attitudinal, Cultural and Systemic change:** With a sustained and long-term commitment to winning hearts and minds, identifying where change is most needed, raising levels of self-awareness and using the most effective methodology to achieve this transformation. Taking seriously attitudinal change means that the Church needs to review the way that it works, a way that is still determined by the privilege and power dynamics of an earlier generation. Put bluntly, the Church in too many places still operates with patterns devised by and for educated white men.

Systemic change must be explored alongside any cultural and attitudinal change. Whilst cultural change can include elements of the systemic, it is important to emphasise the need to explore fully systemic issues to ensure a critique of existing models which assume that present systems and policies impact on or enable all peoples equally. Systemic change would see the diversity of the Church reflected across all aspects of leadership.

- B. **Building trust and confidence:** through leadership from the victims of discrimination and by making the systems and procedures of the Methodist Church more accessible, transparent and accountable. In addition, the Methodist Church will empower the voices of those who have suffered discrimination to ensure that they are heard in the life of the Church and inform its decision-making, with a view to real and lasting transformation.

The ability of the Church to build trust and confidence in the 'Inclusive Methodist Church' vision is essential in ensuring full engagement and participation of all members. Through this process, the Church would seek to give assurance that barriers inhibiting full participation in the life of the Church will be identified and removed.

One of the objectives here would be to create an environment where all members of the Church can say 'I can see me' in images and stories of the life of the Church, reflecting their own experience.

- C. **Minimum Standards:** Minimum standards would ensure a consistent approach for the delivery of EDI and the adherence to legislation, and more importantly facilitate the embedding of EDI across the Connexion. This approach would bring to life EDI at District, Circuit and Church level. Minimum standards would provide a framework for enhancing current structures and processes, assessing performance, providing opportunities for improvement and sharing best practice and facilitate mutual support. Further minimum standards will provide a vehicle for enhanced competence within EDI skill sets.

The process of implementation of the standards would require every area of church life to undergo an EDI audit or assessment against the standards, which in turn would drive improvements and change programmes across the Connexion. Written reports should be subject to EDI scrutiny. The EDI Adviser will produce a series of tools that enable 'EDI proofing' by those producing documents for discussion or publication in the life of the Church.

- D. **Positive Action:** Developing and implementing 'Positive Action' initiatives will address the issue of under-representation within leadership roles across the Church. Under the Equality Act 2010 Positive Action provides a range of measures which can be lawfully undertaken by the Methodist Church to encourage and train people from under-represented groups, to achieve greater representation at leadership levels. Positive action would assist in overcoming disadvantage in competing with other applicants and help facilitate increased applications from under represented groups for leadership roles. Positive action would include initiatives that facilitated coaching, mentoring and role shadowing. An example would be to facilitate shadowing and coaching opportunities to work alongside District Chairs for a fixed period of time to gain exposure to the day to day duties and challenges of the job.
- E. **Scrutiny and Transparency:** Developing and publishing EDI scrutiny methods and guidelines to be used for all future connexional policy and practice development and to audit current policies with a view to action or remedy where needed. Such scrutiny would, whilst ensuring adherence to EDI minimum standards, also encourage and guide best practice.

Implementation

1. Achieving and maintaining the inclusive church is the responsibility of the whole church. An essential element of the embedding process would be to ensure all senior leaders and lead staff take responsibility for EDI within their area of work.

For that reason, the task group proposes that the EDI Committee is disbanded, and that the EDI Adviser has access to a community of expertise to inform the production of policies and tools in difficult areas.

2. 'The Inclusive Church' implementation looks to consolidate into one coherent programme which will seek to weave the EDI work streams into all aspects of our work:
 - a. The number of current EDI related projects initiated in different parts of the Connexion which are at different stages of implementation.
 - b. Action plans to be developed for the five work streams identified in the paper.
 - c. The incorporation of EDI themes into existing work streams.
 - d. Learning from other Churches, partners and organisations. The task group will be consulting with those responsible for EDI in the United Methodist Church.
3. Delivery mechanisms and additional resources required for the inclusive church implementation need to be identified and established. This approach will consider and deploy the existing infrastructure of the Church. Working with the Connexional Team, Districts, Circuits and appropriate partners.

The Senior Managers' Meeting therefore needs to take responsibility for formulating the coherent consolidated action plans with the assistance of the EDI Adviser and in conjunction with the EDI task group.

4. The Council appointed a task group in April 2019 in order to support the work of the EDI Adviser and to develop the community of expertise that is needed to establish this work.

The Council is asked to extend the remit of the task group for a two year period to oversee the implementation and embedding of the inclusive church programme, support the work of the EDI Adviser, co-opting additional expert members as necessary.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

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