

1. Membership

The Methodist Diaconal Order has a complement of 262 members.

Of these:

131 are in the active work (including 8 diaconal probationers)

116 are supernumerary deacons

13 are diaconal students

2 deacons hold 'without appointment' status

In addition, there is one authorised deacon and one associate deacon in the active work and one supernumerary associate deacon. The Order also has 20 people who are 'Associates' of the Order and a number of 'Friends' who commit themselves to support the Order through prayer and advocacy.

Since the 2019 Convocation, seven full members and two MDO Associates have died, four new full members were received by ordination into the diaconate, seven were accepted as candidates, and four members have been given permission to sit down.

2. Our life together as deacons and members of the Order

The Convocation 2019 met at the Hayes Swanwick and was pleased to welcome and receive the ministry of both the President and the Vice-President of the Conference, the Revd Michaela Youngson and Mr Bala Gnanapragasam as well as a number of other guests.

A new video entitled: 'Deacons engage with *Our Calling*' was launched. This was created to offer a tool to Synods and Circuits in discerning their engagement with God's work in the world and in thinking about opportunities for the stationing of a deacon to support and encourage the work.

The Convocation welcomed the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee, the Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt, who with the President, presented to the Convocation the Faith and Order Report: *The Theology and Ecclesiology underpinning the Diaconate*, which was to come before the 2019 Conference. This was warmly received overall, with the Convocation noting its gratitude to the Faith and Order Committee and in particular to its Secretary who had engaged, consulted and supported the MDO at great length and with much grace, care and wisdom.

Following the 2019 Conference, the Order has sought to engage with the invitations as well as the challenges the report brings to the life and ministry of the Order and its members. The Order started the connexional year by committing itself to undertaking

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an in-depth review of its Rule of Life. At the time of writing, this work has needed to be paused due to the restrictions of COVID-19. Work has begun with the Ministries team in addressing how to support deacons and Circuits in understanding and attending to the renewed emphasis on the role of proclamation in a deacon's ministry.

The theme for Convocation 2020 will be: 'Proclaiming the Gospel in life and hope', echoing the words of the welcome service for deacons, where they are asked to make plain the story of God's love and mercy and to reveal the good news of God by deeds of loving service. Like many gatherings this year, the Convocation in May 2020 will need to be a virtual gathering, yet the hope remains this will enable, uplift and encourage the MDO and its membership to continue in its vocation and ministry, especially during the current climate.

The Order hopes to be able to meet face to face at a later date once restrictions due to COVID-19 are reduced.

3. Our life and ministry within God's Church

Stationing 2019/20. At the time of writing, 15 ordained deacons and three diaconal probationers have been matched. Members of the Order continue to commit to itinerancy and direct stationing and during this year a number of deacons has been willing to move unexpectedly to take up an appointment which, if left unfilled, would have had a significant impact on the mission in that place. These deacons have been enabled in their discipline by the gracious connexional response of their current Circuits.

The Order continues to seek to be committed to joining in with churches and Circuits in the work of God in the world. For any Circuit wishing to discern and explore the potential of a diaconal appointment the Warden and Deputy Warden are available throughout the year and at any stage of the stationing process for consultations.

Responding to COVID-19: Amidst the current global pandemic COVID-19, the Order continues through its members to seek to follow Christ's example as one who serves. Like many other people, deacons are seeking to continue God's vital work during this time by seeking to support the weak and vulnerable, offering hope to the despairing, being a friend to the isolated and lonely and being willing to recognise and welcome God in the midst. Members also continue to commit to the life of prayer, as they meet virtually each morning and evening to uphold before God, the world, the Church and each other.

4. Our relationship with other diaconal orders and deacons

The MDO welcomes each year a number of ecumenical guests from the UK and further afield to its Convocation. This year it was planned (before COVID-19) that a small number

of MDO members would attend as guest observers at a gathering of permanent deacons in the Church of England.

Diakonia Africa-Europe region (DRAE) and World Diakonia The MDO continues to be an active member of DRAE with several deacons attending last year's DRAE gathering in Scotland. The MDO hopes to be to send members to the postponed World Diakonia in 2022.

Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) Order of Deacons: Following the visit of the Warden and Deputy Warden to MCSA Order of Deacons Convocation last year, each MDO Area Group is now partnered with at least one deacon in MCSA.

Methodist Church in Sierra Leone: The Warden was invited to share in and explore diaconal ministry with the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone. The visit took place in early 2020.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

50/1. The Conference receives the Report.

50/2. The Conference resolves that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire from Tuesday 4 May until Friday 7 May 2021.