

34. Changing Patterns of Ministry

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Resolutions	The resolutions are listed at the end of the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	This report explores and brings recommendations relating to key aspects of the Methodist Church's changing patterns of ministry.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • The context of ministry in the Methodist Church • The ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry, including authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper • Local Lay-Pastors • Itinerancy and stationing • Presbyters in Local Appointment
Background documents	<p><i>Ministry in the Methodist Church</i>, 2018 (particularly part C) https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2018-32-Ministry-in-the-Methodist-Church.pdf</p>
Consultations	This is joint work of the Faith and Order, Stationing and Ministries Committees.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Methodist Church in Britain¹ is facing a number of challenges and opportunities which impact on the way in which ministry is exercised in Local Churches, Circuits and Districts.² A draft statement offering a theological framework for the Methodist Church's understanding of ministry was sent out for consultation in 2018.³ This theological statement spoke of a need to remember, rearticulate and reimagine aspects of the Methodist Church's understanding and practice of ministry. Much of the reimagining is ongoing work for the whole Connexion as Methodists continue to reflect on how they undertake ministry in the contexts in which they live, work and worship. The Conference therefore noted several aspects of the changing patterns of the Methodist Church's ministry that required further reflection, and directed the Secretary of the Conference to oversee joint work by the Faith and Order, Ministries and Stationing Committees to explore these areas and report to the 2020 Conference.
- 1.2. Around the Connexion there are different experiences of the aspects of ministry discussed in this report, and there are different views on the way in which the Methodist Church responds. Given this, there was not always clear consensus within the three committees regarding the proposals, particularly those relating to Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4). This report, therefore, outlines a direction of travel whilst highlighting some of the concerns and questions it raises, to enable the Conference to consider the different perspectives and make decisions about this aspect of the Church's ministry.
- 1.3. This report focuses on the areas the 2018 Conference directed be explored. It offers some further comment on the current context (section 2) and local lay leadership and pastoral ministry (section 3), before addressing various questions around local lay-pastors (section 4), itinerancy and stationing (section 5), and presbyters in local appointments (section 6).
- 1.4. The background to this work is in section C of the *Ministry in the Methodist Church* report (2018), and this further thinking builds on the theological principles established in the draft statement.⁴ The proposals in this report are thus rooted in the theological framework described in the revised statement that will be presented to the 2020 Conference for adoption as a Conference Statement.

2. The context of ministry in the Methodist Church

- 2.1. As noted in the *Ministry in the Methodist Church* draft statement, the Methodist Church's current context is one of variety, fluidity and uncertainty. Some patterns of church life have changed and others are changing. It is not possible to document, let alone explore, all the significant changes in British society within living memory of many Methodists, but the draft statement offers some illustrations.⁵ The further exploration of changing patterns of ministry found that several contexts particularly shape current challenges and the Methodist Church's response to them. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to address them further, they

¹ Referred to afterwards as 'The Methodist Church'.

² See *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B section 3 and Part C 2.1 and 2.2.

³ *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B.

⁴ *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018) Part B.

⁵ Part B section 3 *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2018).

are important to note:

2.2. Feeling overwhelmed

2.2.1. The experience of feeling overwhelmed by having too much to do was something frequently noted within conversations about ministerial workloads. Indeed, many people in many areas of life describe such an experience. Although experienced more widely within society and church life, particular factors relating to ministers include: the relentless work-flow; the isolated nature of the role (particularly for presbyters); the lack of adequate support (including where there are not appropriate people to take on tasks) and supervision (although it is too early to judge the effect of establishing supervision for all ministers); and the variety of tasks and expectations. Feeling overwhelmed not only continues to be a pressing issue, but it is one of increasing severity.

2.2.2. The feeling of being overwhelmed has a significant effect on wellbeing, motivation and engagement with different aspects of ministry. It impacts on both individuals and communities. The Ministries Committee is currently undertaking a piece of work on ministerial wellbeing, but it is important to note that the issues involved are systemic and institutional as well as personal.

2.3. Stretched resources

2.3.1. The Methodist Church faces the challenge of being a large institution in terms of buildings but with decreasing numbers of people able to take on all of the responsibilities associated with that.⁶ The impact of (generally) ageing congregations and decreasing numbers in many Local Churches has therefore been noted, alongside the increased time and expertise needed to meet increased and more complex responsibilities regarding safeguarding, property, finance and other administrative and governance tasks associated with running an institution which maintains a large number of properties. In addition, the administrative requirements upon organisations continue to increase, for example in the areas of accounting and GDPR, demanding further time, energy and expertise.

2.3.2. Consultations at the 2015 Conference indicated that often presbyters picked up a disproportionate amount of administrative tasks and responsibilities where there were not enough members of the church with the time, energy, expertise or inclination to take responsibility for them. As the Methodist Church has more to do with fewer resources then, in many places, presbyters (who have a particular role in the oversight and trusteeship structures of the church) can end up having to pick up those institutional commitments or requirements which would otherwise be left undone as there is no one else with the time or necessary expertise to take them on. Examples were given of significant responsibilities not being fulfilled. There was general agreement that fulfilling such tasks on an ongoing basis is not part of the role of presbyters, but because of their oversight and trustee responsibilities they often end up filling the gaps, especially when there is a general desire to give more time, energy and

⁶ See, for example, *Statistics for Mission* (2017).

attention to 'mission rather than institutional maintenance'. In 2008, the report of the *Stationing Review Group* similarly observed:

"Our consultations have reinforced the strong perception (among both ministers and laity) that the burden of administration placed on both presbyters and deacons is too heavy. This is not all bad: the area of safeguarding, for example, illustrates how administrative procedures bring to light wrongdoing in situations that were formerly taken on trust. Not all presbyters are bad administrators and not all lay people are good ones: nor should administration be assumed as the main lay contribution to a ministry team. But this is an area where team working is perceived to have the potential to produce more effective ministry."⁷

2.3.3. Maintaining its resources and ensuring that it is as safe a place as possible for people, is part of the Methodist Church's mission, but questions persist about what resources the Methodist Church continues to need (including buildings) and whether difficult decisions need to be made about what should continue to be resourced, and what needs to be laid down.

2.3.4. Related to this are also expectations about what the Connexional Team is and is not responsible for, or what it might or might not undertake in order to support and resource Local Churches. It is not clear whether the role and capacity of the Connexional Team is always understood (both around the Connexion and within the Team itself), and there are tensions around the relationship of the work that the Conference directs to the priorities and concerns in Local Churches and Circuits.

2.4. Ecumenical contexts

2.4.1. In some places, churches are together undertaking mission and ministry in creative ways. Ecumenical working is varied, and often dependent on the nature of individual attitudes and relationships (particularly of the ordained). Sometimes there is a tension between commitment to local ecumenism, particularly where there are good relationships amongst churches in a particular community, and commitment to the Methodist Circuit.

2.4.2. Working ecumenically in the context of differing theologies, polities and ecclesologies raises a number of challenges; and especially where similar words are used for different ministries, masking some key differences. There is sometimes a desire, at the local level and ecumenically, to be able to equate ministries from different traditions, but questions persist about whether this is either desirable or achievable.

2.4.3. When Christians work and worship together, the theology, practice and polity of the churches involved are sometimes challenged, reviewed, and reimagined; and sometimes discarded. Particular questions that often arise for the Methodist Church are how we embody and practise connexionalism and shared oversight, how we confer and discern together, and how accountability and oversight are appropriately exercised

⁷ *Stationing Review Group*, (2008), 4

particularly in relation to safeguarding, pastoral care, finance and property.

2.5. The Ministry of the Whole People of God

2.5.1. In receiving and sending out for consultation the 2018 draft statement on *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, the Methodist Conference reaffirmed that any reflection on ministry is rooted in an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God:

“Belonging to the Church involves supporting and encouraging each other, engaging in corporate discernment and making oneself accountable to other members of the community of faith. Although all members of the Body of Christ are given particular gifts and engage in specific tasks, ministry is always corporate and belongs to the whole Church. Ministry is therefore primarily about the witness of the whole people of God in the world. It is never merely an individual endeavour but always exercised as part of the Body of Christ.”⁸

2.5.2. The experiences and contexts noted above raise questions that indicate some anxiety and loss of confidence in the ministry of the whole people of God. These questions are about:

- a. understandings of shared oversight, particularly the exercise of collective responsibility and collaborative working in Local Churches and Circuits;
- b. who does what, how people are resourced and supported, and how individual roles and responsibilities work and fit together;
- c. how local conversations and decisions about mission and ministry relate to conversations in other parts of the Connexion;
- d. why there is a tendency for some roles in the Church to be regarded as ‘ministry’ for which people have a ‘vocation’ and some not;
- e. why there continues to be a lack of recognition that many participate in mission and ministry through work, volunteering and building relationships outside the Church;
- f. how an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God is embodied in the diverse and dispersed Methodist Connexion, and thus how discernment is exercised when there is a tension between individual needs, gifts, resources and vision (be they personal, of the Local Church, or of a particular community) and the needs, vision and priorities of the Methodist Church as a whole.

2.5.3. This report seeks to play a part in restoring and reaffirming the ministry of the whole people of God through enabling the Church to reimagine aspects of its ministry, but it is hoped that there will continue to be shared reflection on these questions in all parts of the Connexion. The draft statement reminds us that:

“All of God’s people have gifts to be used for the sake of the whole Church for the sake of the world. As the Methodist Church continues to discern how it is to live out its calling in a changed and changing world, all members are called to re-discover, with the help of the community, their gifts and the tasks which they are to undertake. Circuits and Local Churches are the settings in which we consider ways of supporting each other in this endeavour and together responding to God’s call.”⁹

⁸ *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part B, 4.1.

⁹ *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part B, 2.6.

3. The ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry

3.1. As the Faith and Order, Ministries and Stationing Committees have explored the particular aspects of ministry identified by the 2018 Conference there are several areas of common concern, or where there are frequent questions, that warrant exploration or work. It is not possible to address fully all of these within this report. The Conference has specifically requested further work on the role of church stewards and on authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper and the results of this work are detailed below. The other areas identified in this section all merit further reflection. Some initial comment is offered below and the Faith and Order, Stationing and Ministries Committees will bring a further report to the 2021 Conference on issues of employed lay ministry, class meetings and class leaders, pastoral charge, endings, and the importance of pastoral care.

3.2. Church Stewards

3.2.1. Church stewards have a key role in the leadership and oversight of the Local Church. Together with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility, they are responsible for giving "leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity" and holding together "in unity the variety of concerns that are contained within the one ministry of the Church."¹⁰

3.2.2. The precise nature of the church's duties and responsibilities and the way in which they work with the other officers of the church and the circuit ministers, varies. Sometimes the church stewards are the key leadership in the Local Church, sometimes they work with others or there is a separate church leadership team, and sometimes their duties are primarily connected with making practical arrangements to enable worship to take place. The different ways in which the office of church steward is conceived, the Church's changing patterns of ministry, and the different ways in which Circuits and churches are responding to some of the current challenges have led to requests for further reflection on the role of church stewards and the 2018 Conference requested a review of the Standing Orders pertaining to church stewards.

3.2.3. The Methodist Council therefore directed that this work review the particular duties of church stewards in the Standing Orders. Members of the Faith and Order and Ministries Committees in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee have therefore considered the role and main responsibilities of church stewards. In addition, the Ministries Committee has overseen the production of a new handbook for church stewards which offers guidance and is a resource for anyone undertaking the role.

3.2.4. As a result, the general responsibilities of church stewards as set out in Standing Order 633 are reaffirmed, underlining that the church stewards are corporately responsible with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity:

633 Church Stewards – General Responsibilities. The church stewards are

¹⁰ Standing Order 633.

corporately responsible with the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility in relation to the Local Church for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life and activity. They are particularly charged to hold together in unity the variety of concerns that are contained within the one ministry of the Church. To this end it is their responsibility to uphold and act upon the decisions and policies of the Church Council. In the discharge of their responsibilities they are encouraged wherever possible to draw other members with appropriate gifts and skills into a leadership team to be appointed by the Church Council.

3.2.5. Many of the particular duties listed in Standing Order 634 are often undertaken by other members of a Local Church. That they are listed in Standing Orders indicates that they are significant responsibilities that are important to the good order of the Church. It is therefore recommended that SO 634 is amended as set out below in order to make it clear that the responsibility of the church stewards is to ensure that these things happen, but that they do not necessarily have to undertake them themselves.

634 Church Stewards – Particular Duties. (1) The church stewards shall be responsible for seeing that all services, meetings and other engagements appointed on the circuit plan in connection with the Local Church are duly held, **ensuring that** ~~for welcoming and being in attendance upon~~ the preacher **is welcomed** before and after the service and **attended afterwards, that** whenever necessary, ~~arranging~~ hospitality **is arranged** for him or her and ~~that the payment of his or her expenses~~ **are paid** and, in the unforeseen emergency of a failure on the part of a preacher or other responsible person to keep the appointment, for seeing that a service or meeting suitable to the occasion is actually held.

(2) It shall be the duty of the church stewards **to oversee the preparation and delivery of necessary public announcements and to ensure that** before each service for public worship on Sunday to prepare for announcement by the preacher or some other person ~~written notices of all services, meetings and other engagements appointed on the circuit plan or officially communicated~~ and to see that no announcement is made save such as is in accord with the general usage of the Methodist Church.

(3) The church stewards shall **ensure that** give due notice of all public collections **is given**, ~~arrange for~~ the taking of the collections **is arranged**, ~~enter~~ the amounts **collected are entered** in a book kept for the purpose and ~~without delay~~ **that they are** remitted ~~them~~ to the treasurer or other persons authorised to receive them **without delay**.

(4) The church stewards shall see **ensure** that all necessary arrangements are made for the administration of the sacrament of baptism after due notice has been given to the presbyter or presbyteral probationer exercising pastoral responsibility in relation to the Local Church, in the case of children by the parents or guardians, in other cases by the candidate for baptism.

3.3. Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper

3.3.1. In recent years there has been an increasing number of requests for lay employees, including pioneers, to preside at the Lord's Supper. The Conference has stated that it is

not appropriate for an employee to be granted an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper (if it is connected to the role they are employed to fulfil) because of the nature of their relationship with the Church. Those granted an authorisation would not only need to be a member of the Methodist Church but would, by an act of the Conference, represent the Church in a particular way in being granted an authorisation and this is inconsistent with an employee–employer relationship. The Conference has stated that it “does not believe that anyone who is an employee is prevented from being granted an authorisation per se (because someone might be given an authorisation to preside as a local preacher in a Circuit even though they are employed as a part-time finance officer either in that Circuit or another Circuit), but the Conference does wish to reassert its belief that no-one should be granted an authorisation by virtue of their employment, in that presiding at Holy Communion should not be perceived as being an aspect of their lay job, as this is a role of the presbyter exercising a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care.”¹¹

3.3.2. Those working with fresh expression and pioneer communities argue, however, that it is particularly appropriate for authorisations to be granted to the person who is seen as the local leader of such communities rather than someone unfamiliar with the community coming in, particularly if they are unable to adapt their language and practice to the specific context. Many Methodist people feel that there is a natural link between the person presiding at the Lord's Supper and the person who has responsibility for leading in pastoral care. The 2018 Conference therefore directed that these issues be explored.

3.3.3. The Conference has repeatedly affirmed that authorisations are granted for a Circuit as a whole, and are not determined by any pastoral relationship between the person with an authorisation and particular congregations. The celebration of the Lord's Supper in any particular congregation or Christian community is linked to the celebration of the whole Church, which is why people who are representative of the whole Church and the Methodist Connexion are usually the ones to preside at that celebration. In addition, the provision of ministry in Methodism is made by the Conference through the Circuit, including the provision for the ministry of word and sacrament. Oversight for a particular congregation or Christian community is always shared, and it may be helpful for there to be some further reflection in Circuits and Districts with fresh expression and pioneer communities as to how this is embodied and expressed.

3.3.4. There is an apparent tension between the Conference's consistent affirmation of the principle that the pastoral relationship between a person and a particular community is not a determining part of the criteria for the granting of authorisations, and the granting of an authorisation under the missional criteria. The missional criteria are for situations with “recognisable missionary potential” evidenced by “the presence of a new congregation or Christian community developed by an initiative which falls under the category of Fresh Expressions, VentureFX or similar [or] a congregation which would otherwise experience cultural isolation, eg, in terms of language use”¹². The missional criteria further state that there should be “compelling logistical, economic, cultural or

¹¹ Memorial M10, 2016

¹² Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper, CPD 2019, p.766, 3a.

other reasons for authorising a person other than a presbyter to preside at the Lord's Supper in such situations."¹³ A particular point of tension with the general principle that the pastoral relationship is not part of the criteria for granting an authorisation, however, is the additional criterion that the "lay person to whom authorisation is granted should be able to identify with the situation, preferably as a pioneer minister or some other community leader."¹⁴

3.3.5. The Faith and Order Committee has reflected on these issues and consulted with the Chair of the Authorisations Committee and with the Evangelism and Growth team. It notes the following:

- a. For a long period of time the majority of authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper were granted to presbyteral probationers, but over the last 15 years the majority have been granted to lay people.
- b. It takes a significant period of time for relationships to be built between emerging and pioneering communities and the Circuit in which they are situated, and the nature of these relationships varies. The missional criteria have therefore been important to enable the opportunity for celebrating the Lord's Supper in some circumstances.
- c. Authorisations are never intended to be long term but in some situations the missional criteria have been used on an on-going basis. There is also a more general issue about how robustly and pastorally Circuits are exercising oversight over communities that would come within the missional criteria. The nature of the relationships which the Superintendent and the presbyter with pastoral responsibility have with such communities is particularly important.
- d. Presbyters are ordained to a ministry of word and sacrament. Presiding at the Lord's Supper is a core part of a presbyter's ministry. There are concerns about understandings of presbyteral ministry if authorisations are being sought by Circuits in order to 'free up' presbyters to do other things or lead other forms of worship.
- e. In Methodist understanding word and sacrament necessarily belong together. If someone feels a call to a ministry of sacrament then the appropriate route is to explore a call to presbyteral ministry. Particular care should be taken, therefore, when someone has candidated for ordained ministry but not been accepted for training, as to whether it is appropriate for their name to go forward for an authorisation to preside. Some further resources to help Superintendents have robust conversations in these circumstances might be helpful.
- f. There are significant concerns about the calculation used to determine whether there is deprivation. It currently includes the number of celebrations of the sacrament on Sundays and mid-week and in nursing homes, noting that it should be possible for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated once a month in each church at its

¹³ Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper, CPD 2019, p.766, 3b.

¹⁴ Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper, CPD 2019, p.766, 3c.

best-attended service.¹⁵ Whether such a calculation effectively reflects any deprivation needs review. The concept of deprivation in today's context also warrants further exploration.

- g. Since word and sacrament belong together, it would be natural for those receiving authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper to be local preachers. It is, however, unclear from our Standing Orders whether those receiving authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper are required to be local preachers, nor is it clear how District Policy Committees determine that they have adequate understanding of the Lord's Supper. It is further appropriate for them to have an understanding of worship and liturgy and there is therefore a need for training resources to be available.

3.3.6. It is therefore timely for there to be a thorough review of the criteria for authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper and it is recommended that revised criteria be brought to the 2021 Conference.

3.4. Collaborative leadership and team working

3.4.1. An important aspect of the Methodist understanding of oversight is that it is corporate in the first instance (residing in the Conference) and then secondarily focused in specific individuals and groups (lay and ordained).¹⁶ Methodist presbyters have a particular part to play in exercising the oversight of the Conference (see also section 3.3), and the Conference also shares its oversight with the rest of the Connexion through delegating particular responsibilities to other groups (for example, Church Councils, church pastoral committees, Circuit Meetings, Circuit Leadership Teams, District Synods, District Policy Committees, the Methodist Council) and to particular office holders (for example, class leaders, pastoral visitors, church and circuit stewards, local preachers, district officers, members of the Connexional Team). Standing Orders emphasise repeatedly that oversight is not complete if the two strands "of groups and officers on the one hand, and of presbyters exercising pastoral responsibility and pastoral charge on the other" do not collaborate and interact.¹⁷ Each requires the other.

3.4.2. One of the distinctive features of Methodism, therefore, is its adoption of collective forms of leadership, with individual forms of leadership finding their place and purpose within the representative decision-making groups.¹⁸ Leadership of this kind gives to all members a responsibility in achieving the Church's aims, liberates them to take initiatives in pursuing these aims, and facilitates the putting to good use of the enormous variety of gifts among all God's people in the service of the Church.¹⁹

3.4.3. The Methodist Church's emphasis on the ministry of the whole people of God and its understanding and practice of shared oversight leads it to affirm collaborative team working, where the differences of those ordained or authorised to a connexional office

¹⁵ Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper, CPD, 2019, p.766 2a.

¹⁶ *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 2.22.

¹⁷ *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 2.27.

¹⁸ *The Ministry of the People of God*, 1988, 051(b).

¹⁹ *The Ministry of the People of God*, 1988, 053(d)

(presbyters, deacons and local preachers) and those appointed to other roles and offices in the life of the Church can be a source of strength “if their nature is understood so that proper use is made of each.”²⁰ Team leadership and collaborative ways of working have been continually encouraged. For example, the *Stationing Review Group* report (2008) said: “As Circuits are increasingly working in a mixed economy of ministries – ordained presbyters and deacons in roles within and outside the Church, full-time or part-time, lay people employed as well as in formal voluntary posts and faithful members holding office – there is an urgent need to develop collaborative partnership ways of working of a professional standard.”²¹

3.4.4. Such practice can more fully represent the diverse insights and concerns of the Christian community, can draw out and better use the gifts of church members and ministers, and can facilitate a sharing of responsibility, pastoral support, and theological insights. Collaborative teamwork is therefore encouraged in all aspects of the Methodist Church’s life, and it is the context in which the recommendations of this report are situated.

3.5. Pastoral charge

3.5.1. For many years presbyters have been deployed within Circuits by being identified with one or more Local Church. Some Circuits, however, now deploy presbyters differently, for example according to particular gifts or with responsibility for a particular area (such as one of the four areas of *Our Calling*). Concerns about the effects of having fewer presbyters and the different ways in which some presbyters are now deployed within Circuits have prompted questions and highlighted misunderstandings about the concept of pastoral charge.

3.5.2. In Standing Orders, pastoral charge is defined thus:

“Pastoral charge in a Circuit is exercised by those presbyters in the active work who are appointed by the Conference to that Circuit; sharing with others, in the courts of the church and individually, the exercise of the particular responsibilities and ministries involved, they have oversight on behalf of the Conference of the worship, pastoral care and mission policy of the Circuit and its constituent Local Churches in accordance with Methodist discipline.”²²

3.5.3. Pastoral charge in a Circuit is therefore something that is always shared by the presbyters in the active work, and how those presbyters together exercise pastoral charge may vary. It is clear that there is a common misunderstanding that pastoral charge refers to the relationship between a particular presbyter and a Local Church or several Local Churches. It will therefore be helpful for there to be some further reflection on the concept of pastoral charge and this will be reported to the 2021 Conference.

3.6. Employed lay ministry

²⁰ *Stationing Review Group*, 2008, 2.

²¹ *Stationing Review Group*, 2008, 4.

²² Standing Order 700(7)

- 3.6.1. Throughout the Connexion there are many people employed to undertake a particular role as part of the ministry of the Methodist Church. The variety and amount of lay employment has increased in the last couple of decades. For example, the General Secretary's Report (2011) noted the context of increased numbers of lay employees undertaking an unprecedented variety of ministries in our Church, and today people are employed to undertake a wide diversity of roles in Methodist churches, Circuits, Districts and within the Connexional Team. It is not just the number of lay roles that has increased, but the complexity and variety of those roles. There have also been further changes in employment law.
- 3.6.2. One of the ways in which the Methodist Church therefore exercises its ministry is through being an employer. In its capacity as an employer, it witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not least through seeking to ensure that good employment practice is embodied throughout the Connexion. Many churches, Circuits and Districts need support and guidance when considering employing somebody to undertake a role within the Church. Even with the practice set out in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and the resources provided by Districts and the Connexional Team, it is still necessary sometimes to seek further expert advice. Given the range of issues that can arise and the range of demands that being an employer brings, it is timely for there to be further consideration of what it means to be an employer in the context of witnessing to the gospel, of how good practice can better be embodied in the life of the Church, and of the resources and expertise needed to ensure that all parts of the Connexion are adequately equipped.
- 3.6.3. Employment is a specific relationship with terms and conditions being set out in a contract. For all employed roles the job description should be clear, with boundaries and expectations being explicit. An employee is in a particular and defined relationship with the Church. Districts play a specific role in the oversight of all lay employment, including through appointing a Lay Employment Sub-committee, which shall "comprise or have ready access to persons of sufficient breadth of knowledge and current experience of employment law and personnel management". The Lay Employment Sub-committee should scrutinise, make recommendations and give approval for all new proposals for lay employment within the District, its Circuits and Local Churches.²³ All lay employment appointments require the approval of the relevant District Policy Committee.²⁴ The Connexional Team also has a responsibility to provide guidance on personnel management law and practice.²⁵
- 3.6.4. Some roles are undertaken by both volunteers and employees, and this is particularly the case for Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4). An employee and a volunteer have different relationships with the Church and it is important to recognise the capacity in which someone is serving. There can be tensions where paid employees and volunteers are doing similar work in the same context, and churches, Circuits and Districts are encouraged to reflect further on these when considering any new appointment.
- 3.6.5. Those who line manage or supervise lay employees should be careful not to allow boundary slippage, ie people should be clear what they undertake because they are paid to do so and distinguish this from anything they may do voluntarily because they

²³ Standing Order 438A.

²⁴ Standing Order 570(2)(c).

²⁵ Standing Order 438(3)

are a member of the Methodist Church. It is noted that, as a matter of good practice, the expectations and boundaries of all voluntary roles should also be explicit.

3.6.6. It is important to recognise that many Methodists undertake employment within and outside of the Methodist Church out of a deep sense of vocation, which may stretch over several different employed positions during the course of their working life. For many employed positions within the Methodist Church, however, there is no requirement that the person be a Methodist or a Christian. Therefore, for some roles and for some employees vocation will be a significant factor, while for others it will not. This prompts further reflection on which roles it is essential for the role holder to be a Christian and for which roles it is essential that they are a member of the Methodist Church.

3.6.7. Further reflection on issues of employed lay ministry will be brought to the 2021 Conference.

3.7. Endings

3.7.1. The work on Local Lay-Pastors (see section 4 below) involved some discussion about the endings of appointments and, of course, many aspects of such endings are common to the wide variety of roles in the life of the Church, including employed roles, those undertaken voluntarily and presbyteral and diaconal appointments. Endings bring with them a sense of loss. Often there is also cause for celebration of what has been achieved and appreciation of the gifts and graces which the particular person has brought to the role. Sometimes endings can be difficult, particularly if there are different views on the timing of the ending and the way in which it has come about.

3.7.2. Members of the Methodist Church are encouraged to reflect on endings in different areas of the Church's life, and to think about how the ending of a role or piece of work might be handled from the outset. The initial term of office needs to be clear from the start. At the beginning of any appointment it is important to establish the process for deciding whether and when something ends, boundary issues (including confidentiality) when there is a continuing relationship, other matters of good practice and expectations, and whether there will be any liturgical act.

3.7.3. Questions of power and authority often arise when someone ceases a role but is still part of the community. This can happen in various situations including for supernumeraries and for Local Lay-Pastors and lay employees who are members of the Church. The need for succession planning in many areas of the Church's life is also of concern. It is therefore intended that the matters noted in this section will be given some further consideration and a fuller reflection brought to the 2021 Conference in order to help resource such conversations in churches, Circuits and Districts.

3.8. Class meetings

3.8.1. As part of the work on ministry in the Methodist Church the importance of supporting each other in ministry has been reaffirmed and the ongoing need to hold each other to account for our ministry has been acknowledged. This is best and usually done in the Local Church.

3.8.2. For early Methodists the class meeting was the place where this happened (and this still happens in some places, including in Methodist Churches in other parts of the world). In most contexts of the Methodist Church in Britain, however, the functions of the class meeting now tend to happen in different ways and in different places, but there is a renewed interest in the class meeting and in how it might be reconstituted within different contexts.

3.8.3. The reconsideration of the role of church stewards, the increasing number of church leadership teams, the creation of an office of Local Lay-Pastor all raise questions about the role and place of the class leader. The functions of the class leader are often undertaken by those in other roles in Local Churches, and there are some common misperceptions such as equating the role with that of pastoral visitors or house group leaders. There are particular questions about whether the Local Lay-Pastor is a re-envisioning of this office, and it is timely to undertake some further reflection on the role of class leader within the Methodist Church today.

3.8.4. Current reflections on changing patterns of ministry also link with ongoing questions about sustaining the current number of local Methodist churches in their current form and the way in which the Methodist Church shares in God's mission. Methodist ecclesiology allows for different patterns of church life and there is an opportunity to explore patterns whereby a presbyter works with Local Lay-Pastors (potentially reimagined class leaders) in leading and caring for different societies in different places. This links with wider conversations about structures of trusteeship and the restructuring taking place in some Circuits where there is one church with several classes worshipping in different places.

3.9. Further work

There are, therefore, several areas relating to the ministry of the whole people of God, local lay leadership and pastoral ministry where some further reflection would be helpful. In addition the need for reaffirmation of the importance of pastoral care has been clear. The Faith and Order, Ministries and Stationing Committees, under the oversight of the Secretary of the Conference, will therefore bring some further report to the 2021 Conference which will include reflection on pastoral charge, employed lay ministry, endings, class meetings and class leaders, and the importance of pastoral care.

4. **Local Lay-Pastors**

4.1. The background and context of local pastoral ministry

4.1.1. Within the Methodist Church there has been a growing number of people being appointed to carry out particular pastoral and leadership responsibilities in local church, circuit, pioneering and specific language or cultural group contexts. The Connexional Team has developed resources for supporting and developing Local Lay-Pastors, and there have been persistent requests for a greater recognition of this ministry and some form of authorisation for those in such roles. At the same time, such appointments have sometimes prompted questions and concerns about how the Church is exercising its ministry safely and with robust accountability for people in positions of responsibility

and power, and about how these roles relate to other ministries in the life of the Church. Is the emergence of an increase in such roles a movement of the Spirit, or is it a response to a perceived problem (ie stretched resources and a shortage of ordained ministers)? Is the motivation for this further work part of the discernment of the Spirit, or is it felt necessary to address the bad practices and concerns that have also arisen in some cases? It is helpful to look at how these roles have developed.

- 4.1.2. In 1996, the Revd Dr Nigel Collinson, then the President of the Conference, introduced the concept of 'a pastor for every church' to the Methodist Church. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder*, he concluded that "'a pastor for every church', coupled with the genius of the Methodist circuit and connexional system, [would] give us a base for our local churches to become effective."²⁶ Although this vision never came to fruition, in the years that followed many Local Churches and Circuits established some form of this ministry.
- 4.1.3. The General Secretary's Report to the 2011 Conference²⁷ stated it was timely to revisit the issue of local pastoral ministry with some rigour and urgency. In response, the Ministries Committee carried out this work, establishing resources for supporting local ministry²⁸ (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/employees-and-volunteers/supporting-local-ministry>) and defining those in such roles as:
"...providing a focused and recognised presence among a congregation and/or gathered community and in the wider community. They care for, enable, lead and represent the congregation and/or gathered community which they serve and represent the wider Church to the congregation and/or gathered community."
- 4.1.4. There are now different examples of this form of ministry around the Connexion. A wide variety of people is being given significant pastoral and leadership responsibilities in Local Churches with varying degrees of discernment, support, training, and oversight in place. There is a range of different circumstances that bring about the appointment of people to local pastoral ministry, and the role takes different forms in different places. As this report has been compiled attention has been paid to the experiences and learning from different contexts.
- 4.1.5. The current situation is variable. In some Districts there has been much reflection on these issues with clear roles being established and procedures for recruitment, training, and oversight put in place. There is much to learn from these contexts. In other places these questions have not been addressed and a desire for further guidance has been expressed. Sometimes there has been an inappropriate matching of people to particular roles, a lack of collaborative working, some role confusion, and a lack of accountability.
- 4.1.6. The growth of local pastoral ministry is a response to need. It has partly developed from thinking around 'a pastor in every church' but is also different from what was then imagined, as contexts, needs and availability of resources have changed. If the development of this ministry is understood as a movement of the Spirit as well as a response to need, then it is time to consider whether it should be a more generally

²⁶ *The Methodist Recorder*, 14th November 1996.

²⁷ *General Secretary's Report* (2011), paragraphs 38-42.

established role in the life of the Methodist Church. This report proposes that this particular expression of the local pastoral and leadership ministry of the Methodist Church is affirmed as a movement of the Spirit and that the office of Local Lay-Pastor now be established.

4.1.7. It is not envisaged that all Circuits will have Local Lay-Pastors, but that, in some contexts, Local Lay-Pastors might be an important part of the pastoral ministry of the circuit. A Local Lay-Pastor is not an alternative to a presbyter or a deacon as both orders of ministry have distinctive qualities and a particular place in the ministry and life of the Methodist Church. In creating the office of Local Lay-Pastor the Methodist Church recognises, affirms and celebrates lay pastoral ministry, recognising that this is one of the ways in which it may be expressed within a Circuit.

4.1.8. It is recognised that there is potential overlap between the office of Local Lay-Pastor and that of class leader, and some have wondered whether this might be a re-imagining of the class leader for the Methodist Church today. This warrants further consideration and will be explored as part of the work on class meetings as described in section 3.8 above.

4.2. Concerns about creating a particular office of Local Lay-Pastor

Before outlining the proposal more fully, it is important to note that the creation of such an office raises some issues and challenges, and that not all members of the three committees involved in this work felt that the creation of a formal office was needed or appropriate. As part of the discernment process, the Conference therefore needs to consider the following:

4.2.1. Our current practice already enables people to be appointed to such roles, and offers flexibility as to the nature and type of appointment. There are many different forms of local pastoral ministry. In 1988 *The Ministry of the People of God* report, which developed partly in response to “the haphazard development of Lay Pastoral Assistant appointments,”²⁹ affirmed “that there is a distinctive and complementary ministry to that of the ordained ministry.”³⁰ Such ministry included “all those in a covenanted relationship with the church at district, circuit and local level, in pastoral, evangelistic and also administrative work related to the co-ordination and mission of the church. The work need neither be full time, nor even paid, provided that it cannot appropriately be done under the existing offices of class leader, local preacher etc.”³¹ Given the variety of ways in which local pastoral ministry is exercised, and the ability to create paid or voluntary lay roles, there are questions about why it is necessary to establish the particular office of Local Lay-Pastor when there is already the facility to appoint people to this type of role where it is deemed necessary by Local Churches or Circuits.

4.2.2. Local Lay-Pastors might be voluntary or employed. The relationship an office holder has with the church is different from the relationship that someone has as an employee. Employed Local Lay-Pastors would therefore have a dual relationship with the

²⁹ *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

³⁰ *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

³¹ *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988), 04(iii)

Methodist Church, and the implications of this need further consideration.

- 4.2.3. The flexibility in the ways in which the ministry of a Local Lay-Pastor may be exercised means that there is a risk that this is perceived as a 'cheaper' form of ordained ministry, or that there is a potential blurring of boundaries, and there are concerns about how this ministry impacts on and relates to other ministries, including those of pastoral visitors and church stewards.
- 4.2.4. There are different ways to respond to the challenges the Methodist Church faces. Do we have too many buildings and is it time for a radical reconsideration of our structure and priorities? Should we, alternatively, seek to appoint people to undertake a greater number of administrative and institutional governance tasks so that ministers and those with the appropriate gifts can give more time to pastoral ministry and relational involvement in the local context?
- 4.2.5. There are questions as to whether what is proposed is achievable, given the sometimes limited pool of people for a particular appointment and the need for people to be suitable for the role of Local Lay-Pastor. There are particular questions around the suitability of those who have candidated for ordained ministry but were not selected for initial ministerial training, depending on the reasons as to why it was determined that ordained ministry was not the appropriate path.

4.3. An office of Local Lay-Pastor

- 4.3.1. After careful consideration, it is recommended that this particular expression of the local pastoral and leadership ministry of the Methodist Church is affirmed as a movement of the Spirit and that it now be established as an office in the life of the Church. This will ensure that there is clarity about the nature of the role and appropriate accountability for a position of significant responsibility. It is hoped that this will also create space for this ministry to happen in different ways, for it to be responsive to contextual needs, and to enable it to develop further as the wider context changes. The response to some of the issues and challenges outlined above are contained within the outline for the office below. Such an office would not be obligatory. It would be an office to which churches 'may' but not 'shall' appoint. For many churches there is not a need, or it might not be appropriate, to have someone undertake this role. Nonetheless, it is recommended that an office of Local Lay-Pastor be created.
- 4.3.2. There are many offices in the life of the Methodist Church and these are defined in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*. It should be noted that in 2013 the Ministries Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee considered a proposal that there be connexional authorisation for persons exercising local lay pastoral ministries. Both committees felt that this was inappropriate at that time, not least because only those exercising particular oversight responsibilities are authorised by and for the whole Connexion (ie presbyters, deacons and local preachers). Individuals undertaking other offices in the life of the Church are not connexionally authorised for a life-long ministry, but are appointed within a specific context to undertake a particular role for a period of time. The way in which people are

authorised varies, but usually consists of appointment by the Church Council, Circuit Meeting or other relevant body followed by some form of commissioning service. The proposal for an office of Local Lay-Pastor is different from the concept of connexional authorisation. A Local Lay-Pastor would be a local, not a connexional, role to which people would be locally appointed by the relevant Circuit Meeting for a specific period of time. Like other offices in the life of the Church, someone would be a Local Lay-Pastor only for as long as their particular appointment lasts. When the role ends, the person ceases to be a Local Lay-Pastor, although they then have a particular set of skills and experience that may equip them for similar roles in other places.

- 4.3.3. There have been several discussions about nomenclature, as people occupying these roles are referred to in a variety of ways. The term 'Local Lay-Pastor' is frequently used, including in the resources on the Methodist Church website. Although there is the potential for the term 'pastor' to be confusing because in some other Churches and in some cultures it is used to denote the ordained minister, 'pastor' is not a term which the Methodist Conference generally uses and is therefore less open to misinterpretation than the term 'minister'. The title 'Lay Minister' would be inappropriate in the light of the Conference decision that the term 'minister' refers only to an ordained person.³² The recommended term is therefore 'Local Lay-Pastor', and the full term should be used to emphasise that this is a local and a lay ministry.
- 4.3.4. In establishing the office of Local Lay-Pastor, it is intended that the framework for this ministry is enabling rather than prescriptive, open to development and allowing the office to be undertaken and expressed in different ways. It is recommended that the core elements of the proposed office are:
- a. it is a lay role;
 - b. it involves some pastoral and leadership responsibilities;
 - c. oversight (and thus pastoral and leadership responsibility) is shared. The Local Lay-Pastor will work with the presbyter who has pastoral responsibility for the relevant Local Church(es) (and sometimes within a wider team). The office of Local Lay-Pastor does not subsume other offices in the life of the church and a Local Lay-Pastor will work collaboratively with ministers and lay office holders such as church stewards, pastoral visitors and local preachers;
 - d. it is a representative role and therefore the Local Lay-Pastor will be a member of the Methodist Church. Local Lay-Pastors will be members of the relevant Church Councils and Circuit Meeting;
 - e. it is for a specific period of time, and there will be a clear process for reviewing both the need for the appointment and whether it is appropriate for the particular person to continue in the role;

³² *Ministers, Presbyters and Deacons: Signalling Vocation, Clarifying Identity* (2008), paragraph 2.5 and Resolution 52/2.

- f. There will be appropriate and robust support, supervision, training and accountability (see further section 4.4).

4.3.5. It is recommended that Local Lay-Pastors are appointed by the Circuit Meeting to serve in a specified Local Church, and that the start of an appointment is marked by an appropriate form of commissioning service. This will enable responsibility for oversight and accountability, support and training to reside in the Circuit Meeting. This may be helpful when appointments are reviewed, come to an end, or if any difficult issues arise.

4.3.6. Sacramental ministry is not part of the ministry of a Local Lay-Pastor. Presiding at the Lord's Supper and baptising belong to presbyteral ministry and will usually be undertaken by presbyters in the Circuit.

- a. It is recognised that some parts of the Connexion are struggling with eucharistic deprivation. The Methodist Church already makes provision for this, however, through granting authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper where the Conference discerns that such situations exist and that there is an appropriate person to undertake this ministry temporarily. Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper should not be applied for, nor granted, as part of the role of a Local Lay-Pastor. It might be that there are occasions when a Local Lay-Pastor is discerned to be the most appropriate person in the Circuit to have an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper, but this will be because of their standing in the Circuit and not as part of their role as a Local Lay-Pastor.

- b. Baptism is normally administered by a presbyter.³³ Where local considerations so require it may be administered by a deacon appointed to the Circuit³⁴ or by a local preacher with the permission of the Superintendent. In an emergency any member of the church may baptise, but generally discernment about who should most appropriately baptise – if not the presbyter – is shared and is not an individual decision. Baptism should not form part of the role of the Local Lay-Pastor.

4.4. The appointment, support, training and accountability of Local Lay-Pastors

4.4.1. The accountability of Local Lay-Pastors is vital (not least because people will be in positions of power), and therefore there will be robust selection, appointment, training and line-management processes. Supervision will be required. These will primarily be the responsibility of the Circuit, although there may be sharing of resources across Circuits/Districts and further consideration is needed regarding any connexional resources.

³³ Or by a presbyteral probationer appointed to the Circuit, or a person authorised to serve as a presbyter who is appointed to fulfil presbyteral duties in the Circuit under Standing Order 733, or a person granted the status of associate presbyter who is permitted to undertake such an act of ministry in the particular Local Church concerned under Standing Order 733A. (SO 010A.)

³⁴ Or a diaconal probationer appointed to the Circuit, or by a person authorised to serve as a deacon who is appointed to fulfil diaconal duties in the Circuit under Standing Order 733, or a person granted the status of associate deacon who is permitted to undertake such an act of ministry in the particular Local Church concerned under Standing Order 733A. (SO 010A.)

- 4.4.2. Whether the post is voluntary or paid, full-time or part-time, it is important that there is a recruitment and appointment process and that a written agreement is drawn up. This will clarify the parameters and expectations of the appointment including areas of responsibility, the length of time of the appointment, the nature of the Local Lay-Pastor's relationship with those holding pastoral charge and other pastoral and leadership positions, and structures of accountability, oversight and supervision. If it is a paid post then the usual employment processes will need to be followed and a contract issued.
- 4.4.3. It is recommended that all Local Lay-Pastors will be licensed for a particular period of time. A licence is temporary, will be reviewed, and is revocable. The licence will be issued by the Circuit Meeting, but it could be explored as to whether some form of connexional approval or permission might also be given as part of the shared exercise of oversight, and to ensure robust accountability and wider support. All Local Lay-Pastors will have some form of commissioning service.
- 4.4.4. Local Lay-Pastors will undergo appropriate training to ensure they have sufficient understanding of Methodist identity, issues of safeguarding and boundaries, and pastoral care and theology. Alongside those elements that are agreed to be necessary for the basic initial training, there should be an emphasis on continuing learning. It may be possible for training to be developed and delivered locally, such as through the Learning Network, and it may link with other training such as safeguarding. There will need to be flexibility as to how and when it takes place, and for account to be taken of any other training and experience the person has. It is nonetheless important that there is some training in these areas in order to ensure that those undertaking the role of Local Lay-Pastor are properly equipped for the responsibilities they will have.
- 4.4.5. There may be issues of appropriate dress and it needs to be clear that Local Lay-Pastors should not wear clerical dress. Some work by the Ministries Committee indicated that a standard lanyard identifying the person as a Local Lay-Pastor in the Methodist Church might be suitable.
- 4.4.6. Particular attention should be given to the issues around the ending of the role from the outset. If the office-holder is likely to remain within the Local Church or Circuit then clarity about appropriate boundaries, or the process for establishing appropriate boundaries, and how any difficult ending is to be managed should be agreed from the start. It might be helpful for the ending to be acknowledged within an act of worship. Particular difficulties can arise when someone undertakes similar responsibilities in a voluntary capacity, when someone else takes on the role, or when an ending has been unwanted by one party or problematic in some way. (See section 3.6 above.)
- 4.5. Despite the reservations, there was sufficient affirmation for the proposal for the creation of an office of Local Lay-Pastor to bring it to the Conference. Establishing robust selection, appointment, supervision, training and other processes of accountability and support will help to address some of the concerns, and it has been recognised that this ministry is already flourishing in parts of the Connexion. The Conference is therefore asked to decide how it wishes this aspect of the Church's ministry to develop.

5. Itinerancy and Stationing

5.1. Itinerancy

5.1.1. For some years there have been questions around the extent to which itinerancy is lived out in practice. The 2018 Conference noted “the potential dissonance between the Methodist Church’s understanding of itinerancy and experiences of the stationing processes. In practice many ministers are not available to be stationed anywhere within the Connexion and this has prompted questions about the role and place of itinerancy in the Methodist Church today.”³⁵

5.1.2. The way in which presbyters and deacons are stationed differs. Deacons, as part of their discipline within the Methodist Diaconal Order, are expected to be available to serve wherever they are needed and to be ready to move whenever needed. Deacons are matched directly to stations by the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee on the recommendation of the Warden. The Diaconal Stationing Committee seeks, through prayer and conversation, to discern the station in which their gifts and graces might best be used. Great pastoral care is taken to ensure the well-being of the deacons, the members of their household and the Circuits in which they serve. Except for initial stationing, in which student presbyters and Ministers of Other Conferences and Churches (MOCCs) are stationed to their first appointment in the British Methodist Church by direct stationing, presbyters are matched with stations through the Stationing Matching Group meetings (or, later in the connexional year, by the Stationing Action Group). This enables presbyters and Circuits to meet each other before a match is agreed. Although presbyters and deacons are matched with stations in different ways, it is the Conference which stations all ministers on an annual basis.

5.1.3. Although deacons and presbyters are stationed in different ways, a variety of factors, relevant to both orders, have been identified as challenging the concept of itinerancy (although deacons can and do remain responsive to direct stationing and all that that means in terms of itinerancy). These include:

- a. Increasingly, the Church wishes to honour the calling and vocation of ministers’ households. The *Ministry in the Methodist Church* draft Statement encourages the Church to recognise, own and support the ministry of those who are called to do and to be something outside the walls of the church. Ministers with spouses whose work is limited to particular areas of the country continue to wrestle with what it means to be in multiple covenant relationships, especially when the responsibilities inherent in these relationships seem to conflict.
- b. For the interests of the ministers’ wellbeing it is important that they are able to take into account where their friends, family and systems of support are.

³⁵ *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2018, Part C, 4.1

- c. Children's schooling is often cited as a factor, especially because of the difficulty of registering a child for a school place before the family is resident in the area.
- d. With an ageing population, many ministers and/or their partners are primary or secondary caregivers for family members or feel the need to be able to visit easily in an emergency.
- e. Some ministers and/or members of their households have particular health needs that limit their deployability (eg due to the need to be near a hospital with a particular specialism). There may also be factors concerning the accessibility of the manse that need to be taken into account.
- f. Some researchers in other denominations have proposed that the evidence suggests that church growth is likely to happen best somewhere between the fifth and twelfth years of a ministry. Some have suggested, in light of this, that the Conference could decide to retain itinerant ministry (with regard to deployability and discipline) but with longer normative appointments (moving ministers less frequently).
- g. Experiences from fresh expression and pioneering contexts and from work with particular language and cultural communities have highlighted that, for contextual mission and ministry, the practice of itinerancy can sometimes be viewed as threatening. On the other hand, it is sometimes seen as helpful in ensuring that a particular community or project is not reliant on, or identified with, one individual, but that oversight and ministry are shared within that particular community and within the Methodist Church.
- h. Mission studies suggest that contextual mission is important but itinerancy is often perceived to militate against this. It has been suggested that more people might offer for ministry or remain in ministry if this tension could be engaged with more creatively. The circuit system is sometimes seen to make demands that militate against a deeply contextual engagement in ministry. Are the patterns by which we structured ourselves for mission 250 years ago fit for the missional task now?
- i. There are concerns about whether itinerancy makes assumptions about the portability of individuals, recognising that all ministers have particular vulnerabilities and limitations, as well as gifts and graces. The extent to which ministers feel empowered to move to unfamiliar contexts and take on new challenges has also been questioned, as has the level of support available (including in relation to discernment) thus enabling them to flourish and feel valued. The lack of choice in the current stationing process impacts on this, perhaps more than itinerancy as such. All life is lived in social locations and some places put enormous burdens on people. British Methodism today is more culturally diverse and the contexts and tasks are more varied. We need to pay attention to that and to take great care where we send people. To some extent everyone has limits to their deployability.

5.1.4. Itinerancy has also been viewed and experienced in positive ways. Some are invigorated by the idea of moving from time to time to new contexts and the expectation of new opportunities in ministry. Some are inspired by the potential to exercise ministry in

different ways in different places. The concept of critical appointments has recently been introduced in the stationing matching process, and it has been found that presbyters are more willing to move further or to be sent to a context they had not considered if they can see that there is a purpose to them being sent to such an appointment, and matching rates have been higher.

- 5.1.5. In conversations about itinerancy different aspects may be emphasised:
- a. geographical deployability: itinerancy means being willing and able to move anywhere in the Connexion;
 - b. frequency: itinerancy means moving at least once every five years; or
 - c. discipline: itinerancy means being willing to serve wherever the Conference discerns a need, for any period of time.
- 5.1.6. In the early years of Methodism, purposeful and well-planned itinerancy enabled John Wesley to make the best use of slender resources to ensure that the gospel message reached new areas of the country. Wesley's preachers were expected to keep on the move, visiting the established societies and forming new ones. They could respond to need and opportunities and itinerancy also emphasised that the Methodist preachers were 'extraordinary messengers', different from the beneficed and parish-based clergy of the Church of England and the settled pastors of Old Dissent. As Methodists soon became a movement distinct from the regular parochial structures, Methodist preachers soon became more than itinerant evangelists, as a parallel ecclesial structure of bands, classes, societies and circuits emerged, all 'in connexion with' Wesley and the Conference. The pattern of ministry in the 18th century was flexible and categories were fluid. Individuals moved fairly freely between itinerancy and 'location', and the categories of travelling preacher, semi-itinerant and local preacher were determined by circumstance and availability. Typically a travelling preacher might get married and settle down, cease to itinerate, and become a 'local' preacher. In the years after John Wesley's death in 1791 the distinction between 'travelling' and 'local' preachers hardened with the travelling preachers evolving into the presbyterate, and in the early years appointments did not extend beyond three years. Historically, some of the case for itinerancy has rested on the benefits of change and variety. More, though, has been to do with finding the most effective ways of deploying ministers for mission.
- 5.1.7. Itinerancy thus became part of Methodism's understanding of ordained ministry and is primarily about the deployment of ministers for mission. Today it is clear that many ministers have legitimate geographical and other limitations at particular points in their lives due to, for example, children's education, their partner's work or vocation, or a family member's health. Some ministers may feel called to ministry in a particular context, for example within particular cultural or language groups, to some form of chaplaincy, within a particular sector of society, or in a particular place. Our current stationing processes already have provisions that enable these factors to be taken into consideration in the deployment of ministers, but they may need some revision to ensure that they are clear, explicit, transparent and robust (see 5.12 below). Particular consideration of what used to be called 'Ministers in Local Appointment' (MLAs) can be found in section 6.

5.1.8. Itinerancy continues to be part of the Methodist Church's understanding of ordained ministry and a pragmatic response to God's call to the Methodist Church for the sake of the world. It is, however, only one aspect of the covenant relationship between ministers and the Conference. It does not mean that any minister can go anywhere at any time.

5.1.9. The Conference is asked to adopt the following understanding of itinerancy:

- a. Itinerancy is a characteristic of the Methodist Church's ordained ministry. It signifies that Methodist ministers are connexional people who are available to the Conference for deployment for mission according to the needs and priorities of the Methodist Church. It indicates that no appointment is open-ended and that a minister will serve in a particular context only for a period of time;
- b. Itinerancy is one aspect of the covenant relationship that ministers have with the Conference. The Conference stations ministers on an annual basis, but within the current stationing processes only a portion of ministers are available for deployment each year, and account is taken of legitimate limitations on where they might be deployed. At the same time, the covenant relationship implies a readiness upon the part of the individual minister to be open to the needs of the Connexion as a whole at any point in their ministerial journey;
- c. Itinerancy indicates that a minister's primary relationship is with the Conference and not the context to which they are deployed. On reception into Full Connexion Methodist ministers enter into the covenant relationship with the Conference in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry. Presbyters and deacons who are temporarily released from appointment in order to study or serve in a different context are not released from being stationed, nor from the covenant relationship of being in Connexion.

5.1.10. As the Conference discerns where it will station its ministers it will pay attention to the needs of the Church and to the ministers' gifts, graces, experience, sense of calling, and any particular needs including family circumstances, health and legitimate geographical limitations. It recognises that there will be points in many ministers' lives when they will be freer to travel anywhere in the Connexion than at others. It is, however, the Conference that sends ministers to particular appointments. How the Conference decides where ministers are deployed, how it takes these particular things into consideration, and how it ensures that any call to a specific context or particular kind of ministry is a matter of shared discernment by the individual and the Church through its processes of stationing matching.

5.2. Stationing

5.2.1. "The process by which invitations are offered and accepted, and the stations are made, is one through which the parties concerned and, ultimately, the Conference are attempting to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the presbyters and deacons and to the Circuits about how the Church's resources, in terms of its ordained ministers, are

best used.”³⁶ Across the years different processes of stationing matching have been used, and there have always been questions about whether the current processes are the best way of discerning how ministers are to be deployed. Although many of the processes in relation to stationing are the same for deacons and presbyters, there is a key difference in that deacons are stationed directly. Probationers of both orders of ministry are also stationed directly.

5.2.2. In 2002 the *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* report envisaged that, within the stationing matching process, some Circuits would offer appointments that might be full-time or part-time, stipendiary or self-supporting, and that other kinds of appointments might also be available within the process (for example, chaplaincy appointments and those within the theological education institutions). Similarly presbyters would also state what type of arrangement they were seeking. In practice, the appointments offered by Circuits and sought by ministers within the stationing matching process are primarily full-time and stipendiary. The 2017 Conference acknowledged that the current stationing matching process does not fully reflect the flexible patterns of ministry envisaged in 2002.

5.2.3. The vision of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* has not come to fruition for largely pragmatic reasons. Many of the appointments within the Connexional Team are not within the stationing matching process because they are open to lay and ordained. There has also been a shift in the way in which chaplaincy appointments are made as many institutions now employ their own chaplains rather than inviting churches to send people. It is felt that some work towards a stationing matching process which has a greater variety of appointments, including part time, part-specialist and maybe for different periods of time is possible: but it also requires Circuits and ministers to identify and offer these things.

5.2.4. During the exploration of the Methodist Church’s current patterns of ordained ministry, a number of matters arose:

- a. An underlying factor is **the state of the Church**. There are examples of ministers beginning appointments where the profile does not entirely reflect the reality, or where there is cultural depression and anxiety and too great a workload, creating distrust of the stationing matching process. More honest conversation about the reality of different contexts is vital, as is prayer.
- b. The Methodist Church does not have a separate category of **non-stipendiary ministry**. All ministers in active work and appointed to stations within the control of the Church are entitled to receive a stipend (or an appropriate proportion thereof if they undertake their particular duties on a part time basis). A stipend is a living allowance, not a wage, and it is part of the support which is required and which the Methodist Church provides. Ministers do not have to receive the stipend, however, and a Circuit or other body responsible for a full-time or part-time appointment within the control of the Church may apply for a minister or probationer to be

³⁶ The *Code of Practice for all involved in the Invitation and Stationing Process*, 2019

stationed without payment of a stipend.³⁷

- c. Although there are some opportunities for **vocational discernment** for ministers, more would be welcome. Each minister brings particular gifts, experiences and interests, which might be better encouraged and nurtured so that individuals and the Church as a whole might flourish. During the course of someone's ministry it is hoped that there will be opportunities to develop and use particular gifts and serve in different contexts, often alongside and or as part of circuit ministry. There is both a tension and a balance between the needs and gifts of the individual and the needs of, and opportunities within, the Church; and a tension between the Church as it is and what people feel called to and what they would like or envisage the Church to be. At particular points, such as when an appointment is coming to an end, ministers seek to discern their next steps and further opportunities to explore what that might be and whether it might have a particular focus would be welcome (for example, superintendency, rural ministry, or some form of chaplaincy as part of a circuit appointment). There is discernment in the current processes, such as through conversations with the Chair or Warden and the ministerial development review (MDR) and supervision processes, but more intentional reflection on vocation at particular times might be helpful. The Church, similarly, could further reflect on how it discerns the gifts necessary for particular roles, such as Superintendents and Chairs.
- d. **Part-time appointments** seem more abundant than any study of the stationing profiles might allow. It is important to clarify that someone is not a minister part-time as ordained ministry is life-long and a Methodist minister is always under the discipline of the Conference. Some ministers, however, undertake particular duties on a part-time basis and there is great variety in such patterns of working: some ministers undertake ministerial duties for part of their time and some combine a part-time circuit appointment with other roles within and outside the Methodist Church.

5.2.5. Following further reflection on the nature of itinerancy and re-consideration of the vision of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*, it is timely that some aspects of our stationing matching processes are reviewed. It is therefore recommended that:

- a. The process for presbyters offering limited geographical deployment is reviewed so that it is clear and transparent, and better reflects the situation of those who are not limited to a particular Circuit but still have geographical limitations (for example, to a District or a few Districts). This process will need to be extended to encompass the proposals in section 6 (below), if the Conference so agrees.
- b. The facility for great flexibility in the length of appointments within the stationing matching process is explored, including the possibility of ministers indicating that they are willing to offer, for example, three, five or seven years in a particular appointment (instead of the current five) before there is a re-invitation process. A minimum of three years and a maximum of seven is suggested as appropriate

³⁷ Standing Order 801(6)

lengths of time.

- c. There should be exploration of whether ministers who are not in a particular year's stationing matching process could indicate if they are willing (or ready) to move early, or if they wish to change from full to part time duties (or vice versa). For example, some ministers who are approaching or due to sit down might indicate if they are interested in continuing in active ministry but with stability in location and a reduced workload.
- d. There is a review of how particular gifts are identified and made known within the stationing matching process. For example, there are some particular appointments that go into the stationing matching process, but the person particularly suited for that appointment might not be in the stationing matching process that year.
- e. There is further reflection on local arrangements, including appointments which are less than half time. The wider Methodist Church does not necessarily know about them all and such appointments appear to contradict other principles and raise questions about connexional oversight.

6. Presbyters in Local Appointment

- 6.1. Prior to 2003 the Methodist Church had a number of ministers in local appointments (MLAs). These arrangements only ever applied to presbyters. We now use the term 'minister' for both presbyters and deacons, so this section explores the possibility of more explicitly embedding opportunities for presbyters to serve specific contexts within the stationing processes.
- 6.2. The category of MLA was removed because those serving in MLA appointments were sometimes perceived, listed and treated differently from other presbyters, and the Conference decided that there would be only one category of minister, although presbyters may serve in different ways. The potential for a presbyter to be stationed in a local appointment was therefore never abolished, yet there seems to be a lack of awareness that this kind of presbyteral ministry is still possible. Currently, however, a 'local appointment' is related to someone who has 'limited geographical deployability' and this fails to take account of those who feel called to a particular context; for example, a particular language and cultural group, a fresh expression or pioneering context, or to a particular community and geographical context.
- 6.3. The Methodist Church recognises that some ministers have limitations on where they are able to serve for a period of time. It also recognises that some feel called or have particular gifts to serve a particular context. This is taken into account during the process of conversations with the Warden during the stationing process for deacons, but is not always explicit within the stationing process for presbyters. Presbyters in local, pioneer and specific language and cultural appointments can enhance the mission and ministry of the Church, and there is also a potential impact on the ability of the Church to send presbyters where needed if a large number of ministers are only able to be sent within a limited area of the Connexion. Whilst re-emphasising that discernment of call is not just a matter of individual conviction but also something which the Church recognises, both in terms of the individual's gifts and potential

and in relation to the needs and ministry of the Church as a whole, it is recommended that there is a clear means of enabling presbyters to be stationed to local appointments, including to particular contexts, within the stationing matching process.

6.4. Within the present system, the following are already possible:

6.4.1. to candidate with limited geographical deployability (which requires a specific appointment to be identified and does not guarantee that there will definitely be another appropriate appointment at the end of that time);

6.4.2. to offer limited geographical deployability at any stage of presbyteral ministry (although, again, there is no guarantee of an appointment);

6.4.3. to candidate for 'sector' presbyteral ministry (with the expectation that they will contribute to the life of the Circuit in some way);

6.4.4. to candidate for self-supporting presbyteral ministry;

6.4.5. to candidate for presbyteral ministry with a view to having a part-time appointment (but there is no guarantee of an appointment).

6.5. It is therefore suggested that:

6.5.1. The category of 'limited geographical deployability' is renamed and expanded to include ministry in a particular context (such as those identified in 6.2 above). It might be that the terminology of 'Presbyter in Local Appointment' is used, although this does not reflect the suggested expansions to the category and the language of 'local' is problematic in relation to presbyteral appointments. The intention is to more explicitly embed in the candidating and stationing matching processes the possibility of appointments for those whose geographical deployability is limited (either for a period of time or more permanently), and those who feel called to a particular context (whether a geographical, cultural, language-specific or pioneering context).

6.5.2. Such appointments will require an initial appointment to be identified (and this may be for up to seven years – see the suggestion in 5.2.5.b above). If the appointment continues and the presbyter wishes to continue in the appointment beyond that time then the usual re-invitation process will apply. This will be a key point of discernment for the individual presbyter and the particular context within the framework of the needs of the Connexion. It will need to be clear that after the initial appointment ends there can be no guarantee that a similar second appointment will be available, nor can it be guaranteed that a re-invitation process will result in an extension to the appointment being granted.

6.5.3. Presbyteral candidates, presbyters and Circuits which are considering such appointments are encouraged to reflect on the following points.

a. The covenant relationship that all ministers have with the Conference and that presbyters in such appointments remain under the discipline of the Conference.

There is an expectation that all appointments are time-limited.

- b. Further reflection on endings and the different issues involved, including: a discussion of boundaries and expectations if the presbyter remains in the community (particularly if the appointment is not filled); the possibility that the outcome of a re-invitation process may not be as hoped; managing ongoing relationships where the dynamics and nature of the relationship change; and an awareness of the different potential power dynamics.
- c. There are realistic expectations about what the Church can offer (for example, that there is an awareness of the circumstances in which a second appointment may not be guaranteed) and that there needs to be a reasonableness about potential commutes and a willingness to consider serving in different contexts. There is also often flexibility and different opportunities within or across Districts, and the individual's circumstances and call within ordained ministry may change over time.
- d. The ways in which relationships will change, if the candidate or presbyter is already known within the context, and the different role and responsibilities that the presbyter will have in terms of interpersonal relationships.

It is also recommended that those considering such appointments have a conversation with the Chair of District at the earliest opportunity.

6.5.4. It is therefore recommended that there is a review of the candidating, training and stationing processes to embed the possibility for presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural/language appointments and to see how these possibilities can be better communicated and enabled. It is also recommended that those involved in the candidating, training and stationing matching processes (and particularly Chairs, those in the Learning Network, and Superintendents) are further equipped to ensure that they are aware of all these possibilities.

7. Conclusion

Having undertaken reflection on aspects of the Methodist Church's changing patterns of ministry, the Faith and Order, Stationing and Ministries Committees bring a number of recommendations to the 2020 Conference for decision. Areas for further reflection have been described (see section 3) and a further report will be brought to the 2021 Conference.

The Conference agreed to the withdrawal of Resolutions 34/2, 34/5, 34/6, 34/7, 34/8, 34/9 and 34/10 as follows:

- 34/2. The Conference amends Standing Order 634 as set out in paragraph 3.2.5 of the report.
- 34/5. The Conference adopts the recommendations in 4.3 of this report that the office of Local Lay-Pastor be established.
- 34/6. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring revised Standing Orders to the 2021 Conference in order to establish the office of Local Lay-Pastor.

- 34/7. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to bring the competencies and criteria for selection for the role of Local Lay-Pastor to the 2021 Conference.
- 34/8. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to explore any issues around employment of Local Lay-Pastors and establish the content of a licence for Local Lay-Pastors.
- 34/9. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to establish appropriate training resources for Local Lay-Pastors.
- 34/10. The Conference adopts the understanding of itinerancy in paragraph 5.1.9 and directs the Ministries Committee to ensure that it is brought to the attention of all potential candidates for ministry, student ministers, and probationers, and that it is drawn to the attention of ministers as part of the invitation and re-invitation processes.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 34/1. The Conference received the Report.**
- 34/3. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Authorisations Committee to review the criteria for authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper and bring recommendations for revised criteria to the 2021 Conference.**
- 34/4. The Conference directed the Ministries Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to make available training resources for those who receive an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper.**
- 34/11. The Conference directed the Stationing Committee to review the aspects of the stationing matching process described in paragraph 5.2.5 and report to the 2021 Conference.**
- 34/12. The Conference directed the Stationing and Ministries Committees to review the candidating, training and stationing processes in order to:**
- a. explore how it can be ensured that there is a clear process for enabling some presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural/language appointments;**
 - b. explore how this possibility could be clearly communicated to those involved in the candidating, training and stationing matching processes; and**
 - c. prepare provisional guidance for those considering such appointments;**
- and report to the 2021 Conference.**