

AUTHORISATION TO PRESIDE AT THE LORD'S SUPPER (1976)

1. The Conference of 1975, in adopting the Committee's Report on Lay Administration of the Lord's Supper, directed it to 'give further attention to the present distinction between probationers and other laymen with regard to dispensations to preside at the Lord's Supper, and to bring forward appropriate resolutions.'

2. Since the 'present distinction' is largely one of practice, by no means apparent from the constitutional documents, it is necessary to explain briefly what the practice is.

3. **Probationers.** Applications are initiated by the Circuit Meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 011(2), but are then considered by the ministerial members of the District General Purposes Committee and by the Ministerial Session of Synod and, if approved, sent forward, by annual direction of the Ministerial Session of the Conference (*e.g.* 1975 Minutes, p.15) to a committee appointed by that Session. That committee normally recommends as of course the grant of authorisations to probationers in 'ordained men's appointments'; other applications are considered by reference to the criterion of 'deprivation'. The committee's report is not printed in the Agenda; the authorisations granted by the Ministerial Session of the Conference are printed in the Daily Record but by reference to Circuits only, not names.

4. **Other Applications.** Applications are initiated by the Circuit Meeting and considered by the District General Purposes Committee and Synod, all in accordance with Standing Order 011(1) and (2). Thereafter, however, although clause (3) of the Standing Order seems to envisage the direct presentation of applications endorsed by the Synod, with supporting reasons, by the Secretary of Conference to the Conference, the practice is for a committee appointed by the connexional General Purposes Committee to give them further scrutiny, with special reference to the criterion of 'deprivation', and to present to the Conference in the Agenda of the Representative Session only the names recommended by the committee, and without reasons.

5. These distinctions can be criticised both as being contrary to the theological basis of such authorisations implicit in the Report on Ordination accepted by the Conference of 1974 and explicit in that on the present subject adopted in 1975, and as being unconstitutional.

6. The theological argument is that since it 'should normally be ordained ministers who preside at the eucharist' (Report on Ordination) deprivation through lack of such ministers is the only justification for the authorisation of other persons (Report on Lay Administration). It seems clear that if this is the criterion it should be applied to all probationers as well as to other applications and that if it is to be applied consistently a single body should consider all applications at each stage.

7. The constitutional argument is that since such authorisations, whether for probationers or not, are not placed within the province of the Ministerial Session of the Conference by clause 17 of the Deed of Union, they are by that clause all within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Representative Session and cannot be split.

8. The Deed of Union, which is primary and overriding, is therefore clear. On this topic Standing Orders, the subordinate legislation, are more confused. Standing Order 481, consistently with clause 17, does not include the subject in those within the

province of the Ministerial Session of the Synod. Similarly Standing Order 011 is expressed by clause (1) to apply without qualification to authorisation of 'persons other than ministers', and clauses (2) and (3), prescribing the normal procedure, on their face apply equally to all applications. On the other hand some of the later clauses of that Standing Order hardly seem apt in their present form for application to probationers (or indeed deaconesses), while the Agendas for the District General Purposes Committee and Synod reflect the practice of divided treatment described in paragraphs 3 and 4 above.

9. If the constitutional position is as set out in paragraph 7 the only legislation required to give effect to the theological argument relied upon in paragraph 6 is: (i) to give express sanction to the review of all applications at connexional level by a single committee, the status of which should, we think, be recognised by its being officially appointed (it would most naturally be within the Division of Ministries), (ii) to make the slight modifications to the later clauses of Standing Order 011 required to accommodate probationers and deaconesses, and (iii) to bring the relevant Agendas into accord with the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.

10. We bring appropriate resolutions. We have included some minor verbal clarifications, brought up to date the reference to the Book of Offices in Standing Order 011(7), and codified the existing practice by which emergency authorisations are granted by the President. Clause (5) of the Standing Order seems to serve no useful purpose and is omitted, as is clause (8), which is generally disregarded. We propose the expression 'preside at' in place of 'administer', with consequential changes elsewhere.

(Agenda 1976, pp. 294f)

Further reports on Presidency at the Lord's Supper appeared during the following twenty years (see Volume 2, pp. 123-162).