

EPISCOPACY (1998)

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Conference of 1997 adopted Notice of Motion 14:

In order to enhance and develop discussions between the Methodist Church and the Church of England, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to clarify British Methodism's understanding of episcopacy and report to the Conference of 1998.

- 2 'Episcopacy' refers to the office of a bishop in the Church of God. An 'episcopal' church is one which includes the office of bishop within its structures and its understanding of the nature of ordained ministry.
- 3 The word 'episcopacy' is derived from the Greek word *episcopo*, which means 'oversight'. *Episcopo* is exercised in all Christian communions, whether or not they are 'episcopal' churches. Thus, in British Methodism, oversight (*episcopo*) is exercised corporately by the Conference, and also individually, for example by the President, by the District Chairmen, and by Superintendents.
- 4 Although the origins of the word 'episcopacy' and the recognition that *episcopo* is to be found in all churches are significant for any discussion of the subject, it should also be remembered that the words 'episcopacy' and 'bishop' have overtones which are influenced by historical association and by what the words signify in current use.
- 5 The Faith and Order Committee, in preparing the present report, has been conscious of the substantial amount of work that has been done in previous decades in addressing the matter of episcopacy from a Methodist perspective. This report offers a summary of that work, some of which may be unfamiliar to many members of the Conference. It should be remembered that both the ecumenical scene and Methodism itself have changed during the last sixty years, and that every document quoted below should be understood in its historical context.

PREVIOUS METHODIST CONSIDERATIONS OF EPISCOPACY

a) From 1932 to 1947

- 6 In the years preceding World War II Methodism's statements on Episcopacy tended to be framed in negative or defensive ways. The 1937 report *The Nature of the Christian Church* said . . . we cannot speak of "the three-fold ministry" [bishops, elders, deacons] as claiming the authority of the New Testament. Further, there is no evidence that definite prerogatives or powers are to be transmitted. We have no information about the manner in which elders were ordained . . . (*Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* [referred to hereafter as *Statements*], p.26)

However a more positive note was sounded:

The dominant principle of the ministry in the New Testament is that of the manifold bounty or grace of God. (*Statements*, p.27)

- 7 In 1939, a response to *The Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches of England* included these words:

The Methodist Church does not claim that either episcopacy or any form of organisation even in the Apostolic Church should be determinative for the Church for all time. It would not be able to accept Episcopacy and Episcopal ordination if such acceptance involved the admission that either of these is indispensable to the Church . . . The Methodist Church is unable to accept the theory of Apostolic succession . . . as constituting the true and only guarantee of sacramental grace and right doctrine. (*Statements*, p.187)

- 8 Following World War II the situation had changed in many ways. After many years of discussion and consultation among the denominations, the Church of South India was inaugurated in 1947. The Methodist Conference was happy to support this Union which involved an episcopal element in its governance. Many of the anxieties Methodism felt had been allayed and a vision of how bishops might function creatively was attractive.
- 9 By 1946, when Archbishop Fisher, in his 'Cambridge Sermon', invited the Free Churches to enter into communion with the Church of England by 'taking episcopacy into their systems', ecumenism had moved on. The British Council of Churches had come into existence in 1942. Ecumenical cooperation was beginning to take place more frequently at local level. The terrible experience of war had changed priorities. Now, when a group of Anglo-Catholics produced a volume entitled *Catholicity*, Dr Newton Flew (President of the Conference, 1946) was able to draw together another group which published *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (1950). This was not a defensive document against

‘Catholicity’, as might have been expected, but a claim to Protestantism’s place within a much larger and deeper catholicity. The way was open for the Conference in 1955 to accept the invitation to ‘conversations’ with the Church of England.

b) The Anglican-Methodist Conversations

10 In the period 1958-68 reports from the Conversations and later the Anglican-Methodist Commission contained statements about episcopacy. These reports were adopted by the Conference.

11 An *Interim Statement* (1958) recognized that the continuity of the Church in history is important to Methodists alongside another important note of the Church, Christian fellowship or koinonia. Those elements of fundamental value to Anglicans find expression in Methodism in ways different from the episcopally ordered life of the Church of England, also directed towards continuity and unity. Statements like those of Anglican participants encouraged Methodists to see the possibility of episcopacy in a united church in a favourable light:

A firm conviction that the historic episcopate has been given to the Church by divine providence . . . does not require the conclusion that the gracious activity of God is only known in the episcopal Churches . . . We look forward to the ministry of a reunited Church which shall stand in the historic succession and shall inherit those powers, traditions and responsibilities which God has given to all or any of the uniting Churches. (*Interim Statement*, p.26)

12 Methodists responded by rejecting

a mechanical doctrine of unbroken succession by ordination from the Apostles themselves [as] both historically and theologically vulnerable [but] readily assent that the ministry is a gift of God to the Church and that by the second century the Christian community everywhere regarded its episcopally ordained ministry as possessing a commission ultimately derived from that given by the Lord to the Apostles . . . Since by far the greater proportion of Christendom rejoices in possession of this gift, it might be that God is now calling Methodism to find in it a confirmation and enrichment of its own inheritance. (*Interim Statement*, pp.35f)

13 Methodism was asked to consider

whether it would not be making a substantial contribution to the reunion of Christendom and to the development of her own inheritance if [the necessary functions of oversight expressed in particular ways already in Methodism] were brought together in the office of a consecrated person, called of God, authorized by the Church, and representative of the continuity and solidarity of the Church. (*Interim Statement*, p.36)

- 14 The bishop would be
 a humble man of God, the father of Christ's flock, the pastor
 pastorum who builds up the life of the Church, maintains faith
 and order, and represents the unity and universality of the
 Church. (*Interim Statement*, p.36)
- 15 The final report of the Conversations (1963) set out again what the
 Anglicans had said about bishops in *The Doctrine of the Church of
 England* (1938) and the *Interim Statement*. The Methodist signatories
 made clear their willingness to receive
 the gift of episcopacy that is greatly treasured by their
 Anglican brothers as a focus of unity . . . and continuity, and
 as a source of inestimable pastoral worth. (*Conversations
 between the Church of England and the Methodist Church: A
 Report* [referred to hereafter as *Report*], p. 12)
- 16 It was recognized that Methodism had '*episcopus* in a corporate form . . .
 distributed among various officers . . . as representatives of the
 Conference.'(*Report*, p.26) There did not 'seem any objection in
 principle to the coalescence of the functions of *episcopus* in a single
 person' (*Report*, p.26) as long as Methodists had no less freedom of
 interpretation than Anglicans enjoy in respect of the historical
 episcopate. It is clearly assumed that Methodism would be accepting
 more than a name, but an office defined by responsibilities associated
 with existing bishops in the catholic tradition. In 1965 the Conference
 gave general approval to the main proposals of the Report with a large
 majority and by doing so set aside the reservations about episcopacy
 made in the 'Dissentient View', a chapter written by four of the
 Methodist members of the Conversations. (*Report*, pp.57-63)
- 17 The Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission took on responsibility for
 developing the process further. It reported in three volumes in 1967 and
 1968. *Towards Reconciliation* had two sections concerned with
 'invariability of episcopal ordination' and 'The Laying on of Hands', but
 the chief contribution to the definition of bishops was in *The Ordinal*.
 Here the Presiding Bishop was to declare:
 A Bishop is called to be a Chief Minister and Chief Pastor and,
 with other bishops, to be also a guardian of the faith, the unity,
 and the discipline which are common to the whole Church,
 and an overseer of her mission throughout the world. It is his
 duty to watch over and protect the congregations committed to
 his charge and therein to teach and to govern after the example
 of the Apostles of the Lord. He is to lead and guide the
 Presbyters and Deacons under his care and to be faithful in
 ordaining and sending new ministers. A Bishop must,
 therefore, know his people and be known by them; he must
 proclaim and interpret Christ's Gospel to them; and lead them
 in the offering of spiritual sacrifice and prayer. He must take

care for the due ministering of God's Word and Sacraments; he must also be diligent in confirming the baptised and, whenever it shall be required of him, in administering discipline according to God's holy Word. (*Anglican Methodist Unity: 1 – The Ordinal*, pp.30f)

- 18 *The Scheme* contained a summary of how episcopacy would be exercised in Methodism during Stage One of the scheme of union.

All episcopacy belongs to Christ, the Good Shepherd, and the bishop's commission by Christ expressly assigns him to be the chief pastor of the ministers and the people in his charge. As father-in-God to both he is called to feed the flock of Christ in tender concern for their well-being, not as a lord and master, but as a servant of the servants of Christ.

Both as pastor and guardian the bishop must, whenever necessary, within the framework of the Methodist Constitution, see that discipline is exercised within the fellowship of the Church, and that in all such matters every proper step is taken to heal, forgive, restore, or, when all else fails, to rebuke, reprimand, or exclude. Discipline includes not only the proper operation of church courts, and the pastoral care of those who have erred, but the oversight of teaching and preaching and the supervision of public worship.

Continuity with the historic episcopate will both initially and thereafter be effectively maintained, it being understood that no one particular interpretation of the historical episcopate as accepted by the Methodist Church is thereby implied or shall be demanded from any minister or member of it.

Bishops shall officiate in the ordination of all Methodist ministers and in the consecration of bishops.

Consecration to the episcopate, like ordination to the ministry, shall be for life. It will be possible, however, for a bishop to return to circuit work, while retaining the order and title of bishop. (*Anglican Methodist Unity: 2 – The Scheme* [referred to hereafter as *The Scheme*], p.39)

- 19 Emphasis was given to the view that Methodism was not being required to adopt a specific model of episcopacy from the past 'but to join in a search for what episcopacy might become for us and our children.' It was expected that bishops would

undertake tasks of imagination and creative leadership in thought and action. Experiments and enterprises in mission and in the training of Christians are looking for the yet stronger lead that a truly pastoral episcopate will be able to give. (*The Scheme*, p.38)

Bishops would vindicate their office by evangelistic and pastoral leadership. They would be valued as fathers-in-God to the ministers in

their care. It was recognized that the Methodist Chairmen of Districts exercised many of the powers and functions of the diocesan bishop, but did not ordain. (*The Scheme*, p.41)

- 20 The Methodist Conference gave strong support, well in excess of the 75% required, to the unity proposals, but the Anglican Convocations in July 1969 were not able to agree by the necessary majority. The situation remained essentially unchanged when the General Synod debated the Scheme again in 1972. However the position of the Methodist Church had been made clear.

c) The Covenanting Proposals and other considerations of episcopacy: 1978 – 1988

- 21 Subsequently, episcopacy has been discussed again in Methodism in two slightly overlapping processes. The first was in connection with a further set of unity proposals, published in 1980, *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant* (referred to hereafter as *Proposals*). Preliminary discussion centred on ‘The Ten Propositions’ which included, as Proposition 6:

We agree to recognize, as from an accepted date, the ordained ministries of the other Covenanting Churches, as true ministries of word and sacraments in the Holy Catholic Church, as we agree that all subsequent ordinations to the ministries of the Covenanting Churches shall be according to a Common ordinal which will properly incorporate the episcopal, presbyteral and lay roles in ordination. (*Proposals*, p.71)

- 22 The report stated that

Consecration to the historic episcopate by episcopal ordination will become the practice of all our Churches from the point of Covenant onward. (*Proposals*, p.9)

- 23 Within the rite ‘The Making of the Covenant’ it was to be declared:

A bishop is called to lead in serving and caring for the people of God and to work with them in the oversight of the Church. As a chief pastor he shares with his fellow-bishops a special responsibility to maintain and further the unity of the Church, to uphold its discipline, and to guard its faith. He is to promote its mission throughout the world. It is his duty to watch over and pray for all those committed to his charge, and to teach and govern them after the example of the Apostles, speaking in the name of God and interpreting the gospel of Christ. He is to know his people and be known by them. He is to preside at the ordination of new ministers, guiding those who serve with him and enabling them to fulfil their ministry.

He is to baptise and confirm, to preside at the Holy Communion, and to lead the offering of prayer and praise. He is to be merciful, but with firmness, and to minister discipline, but with mercy. He is to have a special care for the outcast and needy; and to those who turn to God is to declare the forgiveness of sins. (*Proposals*, pp.18f)

24 In a later section of the Report it is stated:

While there is no single pattern to which episcopacy must conform, there are nevertheless distinctive characteristics and functions whose combination in a single role constitutes the meaning of the title 'bishop' within episcopal Churches.

A bishop:

- represents the unity and continuity of the Church, thus enabling it in each place and time to relate to the Church universal;
- exercises leadership and oversight in the worship and witness of the Church, to ensure that the faith is safeguarded, the word proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered;
- carries pastoral responsibility for the people committed to his charge, and especially for the presbyters and other ministers of whom he is given oversight;
- presides at ordinations;
- shares in the councils of the Church, with a special concern for those matters which relate to its life at regional, national and international levels. (*Proposals*, p.49)

Though a group of Anglicans within the Commission could not commend the proposals, and the General Synod did not approve, the Methodist Conference did (in 1981 and 1982) and by doing so further expressed its mind about episcopacy.

25 A second set of discussions directly related to episcopacy took place within Methodism itself. The 1978 Conference considered a report setting out some of the implications of a possible future decision to accept some form of episcopacy in British Methodism. The report took for granted that the Conference would never make the decision unless two conditions were fulfilled:

- (i) that the action would clearly advance ecumenical relations generally and particularly those in which Methodism was directly involved.
- (ii) that within the limits implied in (i) Methodism would be free to develop a form of episcopacy that was

consistent with her doctrines and usage. (*Statements*, p.202)

26 The same Conference adopted the following Notice of Motion:

The Conference believes that the coming great church will be congregational, presbyteral, and episcopal in its life and order. One step towards this would be for the Methodist Church to include an episcopal form of ministry in its life. This would be a sign of faith in the future and a way of helping churches with and without bishops in the search for unity. If the responses of other churches to the Ten propositions would cause delay in the process towards unity, the Conference directs the President's Council to consider, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, whether the Methodist Church should not take this step. (*Statements*, p.206)

27 This gave an opportunity for Methodist understanding of episcopacy to be reconsidered and attention given to what model might be developed upon which Methodist bishops might function. The Conference of 1981 was not asked to adopt the report of the working party set up to make this investigation, though the Conference commended the report for study. The working party did not have a common mind on all matters; however it did agree that the office of Superintendent should be developed as the basis for an episcopal structure. When the President's Council considered the draft report it recorded its view that 'no scheme is likely to gain acceptance in Methodism which does not make use of the already developed and significant role of the Chairman'. (*Statements*, p.205) The Faith and Order Committee was required to express its judgement and did so by supporting the working party's view that 'a further development of the present superintendency represented the most acceptable method of receiving the historic episcopate'. (*Statements*, p.230) The working party's report and the comments of the President's Council and the Faith and Order Committee may be helpful if the question is before the Conference again, but it cannot be said that the 1981 Conference added to or clarified Methodism's understanding of episcopacy.

28 In its report on episcopacy in 1981 the Faith and Order Committee had stated its judgement that 'to accept the historic episcopate into the life of Methodism would be in no sense a violation of Methodist doctrines'. (*Statements*, p.228) The committee was asked to explain its judgement by reference to the doctrinal clauses of the *Deed of Union* and by reference to Methodist usage. It reported to the 1982 Conference. In the *Deed of Union* Methodism commits itself to Scripture, the Apostolic Faith, the historic creeds and the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation.

Scripture does not require episcopacy, nor does it preclude it . . . The creeds were composed and the Faith was preserved for centuries within a church that was episcopally ordered . . . The repudiation of episcopacy was [not] one of the fundamental

principles of the Protestant Reformation . . . Luther's doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers was not directed against bishops but against a false distinction between the ministry of bishops and priests and the ministry of the rest of the people of God. (*Statements*, p.232)

- 29 The *Deed of Union* requires ordination of ministers and 'the acceptance of episcopacy is a further step within the terms laid down by the Deed'. (*Statements*, p.233)

The two areas in which the acceptance of episcopacy would be most likely to affect our usage are the act of ordination and the question of how authority is distributed through the Church. (*Statements*, p.234)

- 30 Having in mind the Covenanting Proposals, then still being considered, the report stated that

If Methodism adopts an episcopal order and, as is generally supposed, the President becomes a bishop, if he is not one already, then our usage in regard to ordination will not be fundamentally changed. (*Statements*, p.235)

- 31 The committee drew attention to how responsibilities in Methodism were constantly being re-arranged by the Conference and so to re-arrange responsibilities so that bishops were given some form of authority would not be 'a dislocation of our usage'. (*Statements*, p.202)

- 32 The Conference's next statement about episcopacy came in 1985 as part of its response to the World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

The Methodist Conference has ruled that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would not violate our doctrinal standards, and indeed has shown itself ready to embrace the three-fold ministry to advance the cause of visible unity. Such an acceptance would see the historical episcopate as a valuable sign of apostolicity, but not as a necessary sign, nor as a guarantee . . . We see the historic episcopate as one possible form of church order . . . but neither normative nor clearly superior to any other. We agree that the episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal functions need to be exercised in the Church [and] are, or could be, adequately discharged by the Methodist Church as at present constituted. (*Conference Agenda*, 1985, pp.582f)

- 33 However it went on to say:

There is the challenge to all churches to recognize that their structures are in constant need of reform. We accept this as applying to ourselves. God is calling us to a fuller ministry than we have yet known. (*Conference Agenda*, 1985, pp.584)

- 34 The question of episcopacy came before the Conference again in 1986 and 1988 in the wide-ranging report on The Ministry of the People of God. This report judged that the time was not right for Methodism to introduce the historic episcopate into its system. Far-reaching changes were being proposed that would absorb energy and imagination; any move to take the historic episcopate into our system would at present be damagingly divisive within Methodism; and the ecumenical situation was uncertain and changing, so the ecumenical implications of any such step would be unclear. The report recognized that oversight is found in Methodism both corporately and individually, and was concerned to emphasize that all ministry should be exercised in a collaborative style. (Conference *Agenda*, 1988, p.864)

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- 35 The draft Conference Statement, *Called to Love and Praise*, which was received by the 1995 Conference, contained the following reference to episcopacy:

A connexional understanding of the Church recognizes the need for ministries of unity and oversight ('*episcopate*') within the universal fellowship of believers. In the Anglican-Methodist Conversations, and in the subsequent Covenanting Proposals, the British Methodist Church expressed a readiness to accept '*episcopate*' in the form of bishops . . . If in practice episcopacy serves to reinforce the unity and *koinonia* of the whole Church, it is to be welcomed. Thus episcopacy can be a valuable witness, (though not the only witness) to continuity in and faithfulness to the apostolic tradition. (Conference *Agenda*, 1995, pp. 197f)

- 36 *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (referred to hereafter as *Sharing*), a report of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission, was published in 1996. It contains the following paragraph, which helpfully sets out the Anglican understanding of the 'historic episcopate':

Within Anglicanism, the historic episcopate denotes the continuity of oversight in the Church through the ages from the earliest days, expressed in a personal episcopal ministry, the intention of which is to safeguard, transmit, and restate in every generation the apostolic faith delivered once for all to the saints. It is not the only way by which the apostolic faith is safeguarded and transmitted, nor is it exercised apart from the Church as a whole. It is exercised within the Church, recalling the people of God to their apostolic vocation. It is exercised in an interplay with the whole people of God, in which their reception of that ministry is a crucial element . . . It is a personal episcopal ministry, but always exercised collegially (i.e. together with other bishops, and with the clergy within each diocese), and also communally (i.e. together with the

laity and clergy in synod, convention or council). (*Sharing*, pp.30f)

- 37 The Anglican-Methodist International Commission admits that Methodists have not always

experienced the historic episcopate as a sign of the unity, continuity or apostolicity of the Church. To the extent that they have experienced it otherwise, the effectiveness of the sign has been de facto called in question. A sign, even when it is given by God, can become . . . an occasion of disunity rather than unity. By the same token, in the mercy and calling of God, it can become again a gift of grace. Anglicans who treasure the historic episcopate within the polity they believe God has given them, seek to offer it to Methodists in the hope that it can become again for all of us a gracious sign of the unity and continuity Christ wills for his Church. (*Sharing*, pp.32f)

- 38 The Commission recognizes that

Much of what Anglicans value in the episcopal succession, Methodists have sought to ensure in their own succession of ministries: first, collegially and communally in the decisions of Conference governing the life of local churches; and then personally in the prayer and laying on of hands as a normal sign of maintaining a faithful ministry in the Church in every generation. (*Sharing*, p.34)

- 39 The Commission concludes this section of its report as follows:

None of our churches, viewed from the human perspective, can claim to have been fully obedient to the call of Christ; no ministry has perfectly pointed the Church to the faithfulness of Christ; yet both our churches recognize the presence of the crucified and risen One in our midst, and the guiding and healing hand of the Holy Spirit. In repentance and faith, therefore, this Commission encourages Methodist and Anglican Churches everywhere . . . to recognize formally the apostolicity of each other's churches and our common intention to maintain the apostolic faith. Following this mutual recognition the churches together may institute a united ministry which includes the historic succession as we have described it. (*Sharing*, pp.35f)

- 40 The report, *Commitment to Mission and Unity* (referred to hereafter as *Commitment*) is before the 1998 Conference. It recommends the setting up of formal conversations between the Methodist Church and the Church of England, indicating that such conversations would need to address a number of outstanding issues, including the nature and style of the office of bishop. The report states that

. . . the office [of a bishop] is relational in character and must be exercised in, with and among the community which it is called to serve. The office should not be so overburdened with bureaucratic demands that bishops are prevented from being alongside their people, or that their collegiality with their fellow bishops, presbyters and deacons is diminished. It is a ministry of service which requires an appropriate lifestyle and pastoral demeanour. (*Commitment*, p. 10)

- 41 *Commitment* then briefly describes models of episcopacy in the Church of England and refers to the ways in which *episcopate* is exercised in Methodism. It concludes:

Formal conversations will need to agree a common understanding of the nature of the episcopal office, the style of its exercise and what models will be appropriate in a united Church. (*Commitment*, p. 10)

- 42 *Commitment* also notes that in the Methodist Church ‘women presbyters exercise a ministry of oversight as Chairmen of Districts and are eligible to serve as President of the Conference’, while the Church of England excludes women from being consecrated as bishops. It observes that

Formal conversations will have to face this disparity and its implications for the reconciliation of ministries and thus for visible unity. (*Commitment*, p. 11)

- 43 The Faith and Order Committee understands that the *Interim Report* of the Scottish Church Initiative for Union may be presented to the Conference in 1998. Though the Committee has not had sight of this document, it understands that it contains references to episcopacy. The Faith and Order Committee has been consulted, and has offered its comments, about the proposal, *Towards the Making of an Ecumenical Bishop for Wales*, prepared by the commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales, recommendations about which may be before the Conference of 1998. The Committee is also aware of the conversations taking place bi-laterally between the Methodist Church and the Church in Wales, in which episcopacy is also likely to be a matter requiring careful consideration.

CONCLUSION

- 44 The Conference of 1997, in adopting Notice of Motion 14, directed the Faith and Order Committee to clarify British Methodism’s understanding of episcopacy. Having briefly reviewed Methodist considerations of this subject during a period of sixty years, the Committee believes that the following summary may be helpful to the Conference:

a) The Conference has asserted its view that episcopacy is not essential to the Church, but has also expressed its belief that the coming great Church will be congregational, presbyteral, and episcopal in its life and order.

- b) The Conference has declared that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would not violate the Methodist doctrinal standards.
- c) In the context of proposals towards closer unity, the Conference has on several occasions indicated its willingness to embrace episcopacy, while insisting that Methodists should have no less freedom of interpretation than Anglicans enjoy in respect of the historical episcopate.
- d) The Conference has recognized that *episcopate* is already exercised in personal and communal ways within the life of the Methodist Church.

45 Many different understandings, styles and models of episcopacy are to be found within the universal Church. The Faith and Order Committee has not attempted to describe them in the present report but rather 'to clarify British Methodism's understanding of episcopacy', as required by Notice of Motion 14. Nor has the Committee discussed the issues, already very thoroughly addressed in the 1981 reports, which would arise from a Conference decision to introduce episcopacy into Methodism. The Committee will be happy to prepare a further report, describing various models of episcopacy and setting out the issues referred to in the previous sentence if the Conference so requires. To test the mind of the Conference, resolution 2 below is supplied.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the report.

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring a further report, including consideration of the matters raised in paragraph 45 above, to the Conference of 2000.

(Agenda 1998, pp.67-79)

The Conference adopted the first resolution, but adopted the following in place of the second:

'The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring to the Conference of 2000 a further report on episcopacy which:

- (i) explores the understanding of corporate and personal oversight implied by our present connexional and district practice;
- (ii) explores models of the episcopate from the world-wide church;

and on the basis of (i) and (ii)

- (iii) proposes to the Conference guidelines on issues of oversight, including those concerning bishops, which may guide Methodist representatives in ecumenical conversations and assist the development of our own structures.'