

‘EXTENDED’ MEMBERSHIP (2000)

1. In 1995, the following Memorials were presented to the Conference:

M1 Local Ecumenical Partnerships

The Wimbledon (3/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 42, Vote: 40 for, 1 ag, 1 neut)

1. expresses its frustration that it is still not possible for members confirmed or received into full membership before the first joint confirmation service of the LEP to be ‘joint’ members of LEPs.
2. thanks the Consultation on the Future of Ecumenical Projects, convened by Churches Together in England in February 1994, for the careful consideration given to this issue, and its recommendations for study.
3. wishes strongly to encourage the Methodist Church and other Free Churches to enter into consultation with the Church of England with a view to the enacting by all the relevant denominations of legislation permitting LEPs to extend the membership of those confirmed or admitted into full membership before the holding of joint confirmation services, or joining the LEP by transfer of membership, to membership of the other participating denominations, and therefore to so-called ‘joint’ and extended membership.

M2 Joint and Extended membership of LEPs

The London SW Synod (Present 297, Vote: 274 for, 21 ag, 2 neut)

1. expresses its frustration that it is still not possible for members confirmed or received into full membership before the first joint confirmation service in Local Ecumenical Partnerships to be regarded as ‘joint’ members or to benefit from ‘extended’ membership;
2. recognises the work of the Consultation on the Future of Ecumenical Projects convened by the Churches Together in England in February 1994, and commends its report and recommendations on this subject for study;
3. recognises the changes authorised by the Church of England General Synod in its autumn 1994 meetings for admission to membership of electoral rolls but does not regard these changes as dealing with the situation as described in 1 above.
4. The Synod therefore urges the churches already in negotiation on this issue to redouble their efforts to introduce the necessary legislation to permit the partner churches in LEPs to extend the membership of those confirmed or admitted into full membership before the holding of joint confirmation services, or joining the LEP by transfer of membership, to membership of the other participating denominations, and therefore to so-called ‘joint’ or ‘extended membership’.

2. The Memorials Committee proposed the following reply to both Memorials, which the Conference adopted:

The Memorials Committee recognises the frustration widely felt on this question and understands that, as a result of the Consultation on the Future of Local Ecumenical Projects referred to in the Memorial, Churches Together in England has set up a high level group to consider with some urgency baptism and membership issues. The Methodist Church is represented on this group, which also includes representatives from other churches deeply involved in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (as they are now to be termed). As part of the 'Called to be One' process, Churches Together in England has invited a group to look at the subject of Christian initiation, including multiple and extended membership. A report will be sent to member churches later this year and it is anticipated that the concerns raised by the Wimbledon Circuit will be addressed in that report. The Memorials Committee recommends that this memorial be referred to the Ecumenical Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee for consideration and report to the Conference of 1996.

3. In 1996, the Ecumenical Committee reported that the Churches Together in England (CTE) Group on Baptism and Church Membership had not completed its work. In 1997, the Group had published its report, but the Methodist Council reported that there had been insufficient time for proper consideration to be given to it. The Council was given leave for a full reply to be brought to the Conference of 1998.
4. In 1998, the Methodist Council reported that the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development and the Faith and Order Committee had now had the opportunity to study the CTE report, *Baptism and Church Membership (with particular reference to Local Ecumenical Partnerships)*. The Council's report noted the CTE report's recommendation that

... a church/denomination, some of whose local churches participate in LEPs and which is willing to consider the possibility of permitting 'extended' membership, should, in consultation with other such denominations, find ways of permitting it which are compatible with its own understanding and practice of church membership.

5. In addressing the question as to how the Methodist Church should respond to that recommendation, the Council observed:

At the present time, the Methodist Council is engaged in a process of re-examining the whole concept of 'church membership'. It may be thought, therefore, that this may not be a good time to consider 'extending' membership. There would be little point in devising ways of permitting 'extended' membership 'which are compatible with (our) own

understanding and practice of church membership', if that understanding and practice were liable to change in the foreseeable future. It might be better for the review to be completed before the possibility of 'extended' membership is addressed.

On the other hand, ecumenical factors ought to be taken seriously when all matters of ecclesiology and church government are under consideration. It would be wrong to review 'membership' in Methodism without reference to the existence of LEPs or other ecumenical developments. The Council therefore proposes to address the recommendation quoted in paragraph 10 above as part of its ongoing review of church membership, and will report to the Conference in due course.

6. The Council reported to the Conference of 1999 in *Membership and Christian Discipleship*. The matter of 'extended membership' was considered in the context of the report's main recommendations. The Conference, though it adopted most of the proposals contained in the report, declined a resolution which would have opened up membership of the Methodist Church to unconfirmed people and which would have led to the introduction of a periodic redrawing of a local church's membership list. The decisions of the Conference, taken together with its adoption of the Conference Statement, *Called to Love and Praise*, mean that no fundamental change in the Methodist Church's understanding or practice of membership has been agreed or is likely to be agreed in the foreseeable future.
7. It is now possible, therefore, to revisit the CTE report's recommendation.
8. The working party which produced *Baptism and Church Membership* came into being partly as a result of a resolution of the 1992 Conference which urged the appropriate working parties within Churches Together in England 'to undertake further work on the theology and practice of church membership and the question of Extended Membership'. It is clear from the Memorials submitted to the 1995 Conference that the need for 'extended' membership is keenly felt in many LEPs. The Conference's own resolution of 1992 suggests that the Methodist Church would in principle be open to finding ways of permitting such extended membership.
9. *Baptism and Church Membership* acknowledges that, among the churches, there are considerable differences in the understanding both of 'church' and of 'membership'. For example, all who are baptized, live in the parish, and regard themselves as members of the Church of England are formally so regarded. However, each parish establishes an electoral roll of those 'members' who live in the parish or attend worship and ask to be entered on the roll. Though both churches practise confirmation, there is nothing in the Church of England that corresponds with the Methodist practice of 'reception into membership' during a service of worship after candidates have been approved by the Church

Council. If there were a concept of the meaning of church membership common to all, or several, denominations, the implementation of 'extended' membership would be facilitated; but no such common understanding exists.

10. Nevertheless, it may be possible for some denominations to adopt procedures which would enable them to extend membership, as they understand it, to other Christians. The Church of England has made considerable progress towards the extension of 'membership' (as that Church understands it) in its 1995 amendments to the Church Representation Rules. It is now possible for anyone able to make the following declaration to be entered on the electoral roll of a parish:

I am baptised and am 16 or over. I am a member in good standing of a church not in communion with the Church of England, which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and also am a member of the Church of England and I have habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment.

11. Since entry on the electoral roll entitles a person to elect or be elected on to the councils of the Church of England, this is a very significant development. Is there any comparable step which the Methodist Church could take?
12. To answer this question, it is necessary to reflect upon how a person becomes a member of the Methodist Church. Prior to the early 1990s, whatever many people thought was the case, Methodist membership was conferred by the vote of the Church Council. The subsequent service was strictly speaking a recognition service, rather than one of reception. A Faith and Order report in 1992 clarified the situation that then existed and argued that people should be received into membership in an act of worship (which should include confirmation for any persons not previously confirmed), the Church Council having approved the reception of such people. The Committee's recommendation was adopted and the Deed of Union amended accordingly.
13. A person becomes a member of the Methodist Church by being received as such during an act of worship. In most cases, Reception into Membership accompanies Confirmation. But it happens from time to time that a person who has been confirmed and/or been a member of another Christian communion wishes to 'transfer' his or her membership to the Methodist Church. Provision is made for this both constitutionally (Standing Order 052(1) and (2)) and liturgically in *The Reception of Christians of Other Communion into the Membership of the Methodist Church (The Methodist Worship Book, pp.353f)*.
14. *The Reception of Christians of Other Communion into the Membership of the Methodist Church* was designed for use when persons who 'had been' members of other communions are now 'transferring' to the membership of the Methodist Church. The Faith and Order Committee believes, however, that with two small modifications, this service could be used to confer 'extended membership'. It would then be possible to

receive people into Methodist membership, without expecting them to renounce their 'membership' of other communions. The Faith and Order Committee has sought the advice of the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development, and of the Law and Polity Committee, which judges that no change would be required to Standing Order 052 to enable this to happen, though since clause 8(e)(i) of the Deed of Union could be interpreted as permitting only outright transfer, it would be prudent for the Conference to amend it as proposed in resolution 2.

15. If a person who had received 'extended membership' were to leave the LEP and to join a solely Methodist local church, his or her membership would be transferred in the usual manner. If the receiving church were of another denomination, either the person's membership would be transferred to that denomination, if that were possible, or the appropriate process under clause 10 of the Deed of Union would be invoked to determine whether the Methodist membership lapsed.
16. These modifications would be required in the words addressed in no.1 of the service to those to be received:

*N and N (N), you ~~have been~~ **are** members of other communions within the Church of Christ. Do you ~~now~~ wish **also** to be members of the Methodist Church?*
17. It is to be hoped that other churches involved in LEPs will also find ways of extending membership, as the Church of England has already done. A group convened by the Free Churches' Council to discuss extended membership was informed, in January 2000, of the recommendations of the Faith and Order Committee on this matter and responded positively and indeed enthusiastically. If extended membership were to be conferred by another denomination, or more than one, as well as by Methodists, in the same service, it might well be appropriate to produce a special liturgy for the occasion, incorporating the necessary elements of each denomination's rite. In these circumstances, the words and actions of nos. 1-3 (MWB pp.353f), as amended above, should always be included.
18. If the Conference adopts the resolutions which follow, it will be possible for the Methodist Church to confer 'extended membership' in the way indicated above, provided that the Conference of 2001 confirms the proposed amendment to the Deed of Union.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference adopts the report.

The Conference amends clause 8(e)(i) of the Deed of Union as follows:

- (i) the admission into membership of persons received from other Methodist churches or *who are members of* other Christian communions;