

LAY ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS (1946)

I. Affirmations.

(a) The Methodist Church recognises two sacraments, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as of Divine Appointment and of perpetual obligation, of which it is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves. Therefore the first consideration must be to provide for the orderly and regular administration of the Lord's Supper. It is desirable, wherever possible, that the sacrament should be administered monthly and under no circumstances less frequently than once a quarter.

(b) The general usage whereby the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered by Ministers shall continue to be observed.

(c) The Committee accepts the principle of duly authorised lay administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper throughout Methodism.

II. Observations.

(1) The Standing Order No. 226, paragraph (6), provided for a transitional period during which there would be different usages throughout the united Methodist Church. This period will have continued for fourteen years at the Conference of 1946.

(2) The existence of different usages does create practical difficulties. The fact that Churches can continue their pre-Union practices has blocked the way to local amalgamation in some areas. There are varying practices within Circuits, even though the Standing Order does provide for a policy in amalgamated Circuits. Such continued variation, which in spite of this provision is justified generally by the Standing Order, has created acute differences in some circuits.

(3) It could never have been anticipated that differences of practice in administration should be perpetuated, and the time would appear to have come when so many amalgamations have been carried out, that a common policy for the whole Church should be adopted. Circuits have been reduced from 1,775 to 1,137. The settlement of this question of administration will help to facilitate the further amalgamations which are necessary.

(4) The Standing Order, in setting out a policy to be adopted in amalgamated Circuits, does indicate in our judgement the kind of policy which should belong to the Church as a whole. This, in brief, is the general usage of administration by Ministers but with provision for lay administration where it is needed or required. The general experience acquired in recent years suggests that it would be a great mistake to attempt to exclude lay administration. Not only would this create very real difficulty in respect of some Circuits where lay administration has been very strongly held as a principle, but it would also be regarded as unfortunate by some other Circuits where the absence of lay administration has led to very infrequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.

III. Suggestions. (Adopted by the Conference.)

(1) When it can be shown to the Superintendent of the Circuit and the District Home Mission and Chapel Committee that a Circuit considers that any of its churches is deprived of reasonably frequent and regular administration through lack of Ministers, the Circuit concerned may apply for the authorisation of persons other than Ministers to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper when appointed to do so on the Circuit plan.

(2) Suitable persons, being members of Society within the Circuit, shall be nominated by the March Quarterly Meeting to administer the Sacraments within the Circuit. These persons, having been approved by the District Synod, shall, if accepted by Conference, be authorised by Conference for that service.

(3) The responsibility for the choice of persons for this solemn office should rest upon Quarterly Meetings, Synod, and Conference.

(4) The authorisation shall be renewable every three years. It shall be cancelled by cessation of membership, removal from the Circuit, resignation, or resolution of the Conference.

(5) Persons so authorised should receive instruction in the administration of the Sacraments by the Chairman of the District or a Minister appointed by him; the forms of service in our *Book of Offices* being used as a basis of instruction.

(6) All authorised persons (if not already set apart for the purpose) shall be inducted into their office at a public service under the direction of the Chairman of the District or a Minister appointed by him.

IV. The Sacrament of Baptism.

This subject raises issues which cannot be dealt with by this Committee. Our present position is chaotic. The problems raised are both doctrinal and practical. The relation of this Sacrament to the Pastoral Office, the conditions under which this Sacrament should be administered, the use of the form of Service under which the Sacrament should be administered, the use of the form of Service authorised by the Conference to prevent superstitious notions from gaining encouragement in our Church, the relation of baptised children to the Church, carry us far beyond our terms of reference. But they are not unrelated to the subject committed to our consideration, and we feel we are within our province in asking the Conference to review the subject as a whole.

(Minutes 1946, pp. 203f)

Section 1(b) continues the provision previously made in the Deed of Union, clause 32, which was removed from the Deed itself by the 1948 Conference. (*Minutes 1948, p. 213.*)