

THE GRANTING OF AUTHORISATIONS TO PRESIDE AT THE LORD'S SUPPER TO PERSONS OTHER THAN MINISTERS (1986)

The Conference of 1985 (Daily Record p.24) instructed the Faith & Order Committee to bring together all the criteria used in judging a request for a person other than a minister to preside at the Lord's Supper under S.O. 011. Three criteria must be borne in mind. Reference to one or more of these criteria, together with a copy of the plan and supporting evidence, should be made in the application from the Synod to the Committee for Authorisations.

1. Basic Deprivation

Standing Order 011 defines the procedures by which any Circuit believing itself to be 'deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper through lack of ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament when appointed to do so on the circuit plan'.

The definition of the word 'deprivation' is found in the Faith & Order Report to Conference of 1975.

'The present practice of the Committee on Lay Authorisations, which acts for the Secretary of Conference in the matter, working on a rule of thumb that a church should have a monthly Lord's Supper if so desired, is to divide the number of churches in a circuit by the number of ministers and after taking into account the mobility of ministers, the size of the churches, the availability of supernumeraries, sector ministers and other ministers without pastoral charge and the number of churches with less than two services per Sunday, if the result is five or more to agree that a condition of deprivation exists'.

The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1976 makes it clear that probationers are to be treated like other unordained persons, although the Committee for Lay Authorisations normally considers that the stationing of a Probationer in an ordained minister's appointment is prima facie evidence for a situation of deprivation.

2. Desire for more frequent Holy Communion

The Faith & Order Committee Report to Conference of 1984 admitted the possibility of far greater interest in and awareness of the service of Holy Communion in some parts of the Methodist Church.

'If a Church wishes for a weekly celebration and the exigencies of planning make only monthly celebration possible, then that Church may reasonably be said to be deprived. Provided a request is made in these terms the Committee for Authorisation should, all things being equal, accede to it.'

3. Missionary Situations

The 1984 Report recognised the growing need in missionary situations.

‘Even where there are sufficient ordained ministers in the circuit to maintain frequent Communion, that area may have such a sense of identity, and the involvement of the lay person may be so complete, that it may be reasonably said that the worship and witness of the community there would be seriously impeded if the lay person were unable to preside at Holy Communion.’

The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 recommended the following criteria to be applied in relation to ‘missionary situations’.

1. The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and District support for such a mission, and signs of growth.
2. The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.
3. The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the ‘isolated area’, living within it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.
4. It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement.

Background documents

1. Standing Order 011
2. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1975 (Agenda pp.253-256)
3. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1976 (Agenda pp.294-295 and Resolution 2, pp.298-300)
4. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1984 (Agenda pp.24-28)
5. The Report of the Faith & Order Committee to the Conference of 1985 (Agenda pp.627-628)

APPENDIX

CRITERIA ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON LAY AUTHORISATIONS IN CALCULATING DEPRIVATION

In attempting to interpret the definition of basic deprivation contained in the Faith & Order report, the Committee on Lay Authorisation has the difficult task of taking into account many factors. Some can be quantified, others cannot. The extent of the influence of the latter has to rest on the experience and judgement of the

members of the Committee, whose recommendation is, of course, subject to the judgement of Conference.

The following 'guidelines' help the Committee in reaching a judgement on basic deprivation as defined in section 1 of the Faith and Order report.

1. The number of churches is calculated on the assumption that a church has two services. If a considerable number of churches in a circuit have one service per week the number of churches is reduced for the purposes of any calculation. No mathematical formula can be offered, times of services and the number of one service churches have to be borne in mind in arriving at an agreed number of churches figure.
2. The number of ministers is calculated by adding to the number of ministers stationed other ministerial help available. The Committee takes into account evidence of assistance being offered by supernumerary ministers, ministers in other appointments and ministers without pastoral charge. For example, an active supernumerary, with transport, who conducts 13 services a quarter, might be counted as half a minister for the purpose of this calculation.
3. The number of churches is divided by the number of ministers and if the result is five or more a situation of deprivation is deemed to exist.
4. If the result of the calculation is less than five but close to it the Committee takes into consideration the following factors which cannot easily be quantified.
 - (a) A circuit which is widespread and where there is evidence of travel problems.
 - (b) The personal circumstances of individual ministers (eg. transport available and health).
 - (c) The relative sizes of churches, bearing in mind that a minister is likely to want to conduct more services in a large church than in a lot of smaller churches.
 - (d) Other relevant evidence offered in the submission by the Synod.
5. Similar criteria to the above are used when an application is received in an emergency under S.O. 011 (7).
6. When application for a renewal is received under S.O. 011 (5), evidence is sought of the frequency with which a person, who has received an authorisation previously, has conducted the Lord's Supper.

RESOLUTION

That the Conference notes the criteria previously adopted and also notes the ways in which they are applied.

(Agenda 1986, pp.665-668)