

56. Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church

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Summary of Content

Subject and aims	<p>The Methodist Church aims to live out our theological conviction that God's love is for all and that <i>Our Calling</i> bears witness to this. This report sets out a Strategy for Justice, Dignity, and Solidarity, so that this becomes not just something we say but something we live out in practice.</p> <p>This report aims to help the Methodist Church become as fully inclusive as possible and addresses matters of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), recognising this to be a crucial witness to the Gospel of God's love for all in Christ.</p> <p>The strategy aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● for the rich diversity of people within the Methodist Church to be recognised as a cause for thanksgiving, celebration and praise;● to eradicate all discrimination and coercive control within the Methodist Church, and for all people to be treated justly and with dignity across the breadth of the Methodist Church;● for a paradigm shift (a profound change) in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church so that all Methodists are able to be full participants in the Church's life.
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Main points

- The Methodist Conference is asked to re-affirm our Methodist theology which recognises that all people are made in the image of God, all are equally welcome at the table of Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit breathes life into each one of us.
- Transformational change is needed as we engage with others in the Spirit of Christ: with openness, humility, respect and a willingness to learn from each other.
- Our calling, as Methodists, has always included a calling to social justice which is key to the Gospel, but we have failed, often, to live that out by our exclusion of people considered to be 'different'.
- There has been a tragic number of incidents of discrimination, coercive control, and abuse of power, within the life of the Methodist Church, which we have failed to prevent and challenge despite our theology.
- This Strategy includes mandatory actions for local churches, circuits, districts and the Methodist Council, designed to embed a culture of justice and respect for all, as equal partners in the Gospel.
- Each church, Circuit, District, and the Methodist Council will use the same strategy for this work, and we will expect the leadership of the Church to abide by and promote this strategy.
- For the strategy to be effective there will need to be EDI Officers to support the implementation of this strategy across every sphere of church life.
- Above all, this commitment to justice, dignity and solidarity is crucial to all our theology and practice in every sphere of the Church's life.

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Background Context

1. The Methodist Church in Britain has had a long history of being an advocate for social justice and challenging injustice. Work on gender justice was first brought to the Wesleyan Conference in 1928, and the first women presbyters were ordained in 1974, a year before the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Work on racial justice was brought to the Conference in 1962, long before the Government's introduction of the Race Relations Act (1976). These are just a few examples. Underpinning all this work, is our firm belief that all are created in God's image and all are one in Christ Jesus.
2. Following on from those years of work, as a Church we have made significant progress across all protected characteristics as stated under the Equalities Act 2010. However, today the issue of discrimination, based on race, sexuality, gender and disability, is still a major challenge for the Church. To become an "Inclusive Church" significant transformation is required and this will include organisational, structural and cultural change. There will need to be someone with responsibility for EDI in each sphere of Church life.
3. In 2019, the Methodist Council asked the EDI Committee to "define the Council's EDI strategy giving careful attention to all areas of inclusion". The Council reported to the 2020 Conference that it had affirmed the four elements of the 'Inclusive Methodist Church' and that it had affirmed the intention of the Task Group and Committee to work towards that vision.¹
4. The paper to the Methodist Council, MC/20/51, commented that "Re-defining the norm is necessary if the Methodist Church is going to develop a means of moving beyond the rhetoric of apology into a more determined and intentional mode of challenging injustice, be it on the grounds of 'race', gender, sexuality or disability and be a site for equity and full inclusion as it hopes and believes itself to be."

1 The Methodist Conference, 2020, Methodist Council part 2, Section K

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Relevant Documents (with function)	<p>In 1999, the Conference adopted the report <i>Called to Love and Praise</i>, on the nature of the Church, which spelled out that “Wesley’s call to personal faith and to holiness reflected a concern for justice and integrity in everyday life, and also an optimism about what the grace of God could accomplish in human lives.” (4.2.2)</p> <p>In 2015 the Faith and Order Committee provided a theological document to underpin the work of the EDI Toolkit. This opens by saying, “It is the Church’s intention to value every human being as part of God’s creation and the whole people of God. At the heart of the Methodist community is a deep sense of the place of welcome, hospitality and openness which demonstrates the nature of God’s grace and love for all.” This present report includes a Faith and Order Committee revision of this text (Appendix 5).</p>
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A Statement of Intent

- a) In response to the Gospel, the Methodist Church seeks to be a Church in which God’s unconditional love is expressed in word and actions, where all are fully able to play their part in the Church’s life.
- b) Wanting to reflect the life-giving relationship of diversity and unity seen most fully in the Trinitarian nature of God, our worship and service, and life and mission will include fully the contributions and participation of those of different backgrounds, identities and abilities.
- c) Believing that the diversity of the human race is a gift, the Methodist Church seeks to enable its leadership to reflect the diversity of its membership and draw on the richness of this gift, across all its life and structures, with processes and practices which ensure that no-one is treated unjustly and no-one’s dignity is denied.
- d) The discipline of the Methodist Church will be upheld in the face of any unjust discrimination²: we will aim to prevent, challenge and redress all behaviours which are discriminatory or belittling, and will monitor our activities in the light of this commitment.

2 This report is using the phrase ‘unjust discrimination’ to reflect that there is just discrimination (eg, about the level of access to buildings and activities perhaps due to some safeguarding concerns). In some senses there is positive discrimination practice (eg, to ensure appropriate representation).

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The 'List of Indicators' in Appendix 6 gives a tool for each of us to consider how our individual and collective lives are developing in relation to this commitment.

1. a) This strategy is needed because it is fundamental to our faith, spirituality and ecclesiology.

We care about these issues because we are people of faith and disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel imperative is that Christ is for all. We are united in Christ, and we are called to 'love our neighbours as ourselves'. This is all about all people being made in the image of God, it is about a Biblical call to justice, it is about incarnation, it is about the gifting of the Holy Spirit to all baptised people, and is about so much more than equality, diversity and inclusion. This work is a transformative witness to our loving and just God, so that we may speak, and live and love, with integrity. It is not hyperbole to say that this is absolutely vital to Christian discipleship.

b) This strategy is needed because of the experiences of Methodist people:

"It was several years after being told I wasn't suitable for the position – and doing considerable self-searching to understand why – that I was brave enough to discuss it with others. That's when I realised my rejection was actually systemic. No one 'like me' was deemed suitable."

"There were always two ordained ministers in each church's staff team, but I was the only woman with four men. When the minister of another church heard that my colleague was retiring, he, looking directly at me, said "so [that church] won't have a minister then."

"Some people try to be kind and mean well, but can be so patronising. I wheeled myself all the way to church and was feeling quite chipper and proud. The welcome steward took one look at the chair and said, 'Oh, I'm **so sorry**'."

"At a circuit meeting I had to sit there and politely listen to "on my farm a cow is a cow, it can't decide to become a sheep. And if it decides it won't mate as God intended because it fancies girls, it gets shot". I am still not "out" in my church. I know that lots of members of the congregation would try and "save" me and more might even be intentionally hurtful. I am biding my time."

"I fear that should we fail to embrace this pilgrimage, or should we abandon it because it is too demanding or too dangerous, or too difficult, we will have turned our backs on the gospel and have no good news for the world."

"I have been a member of the church council for five years but never felt comfortable

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speaking. I left school at 16. When documents are circulated before meetings, I can follow without difficulty, but other council members have resisted making this standard practice. I have recently undergone training at circuit level with more large documents and dense PowerPoint slides which have further knocked my confidence. The nature of my work makes it difficult for me to guarantee my availability for meetings in advance. This has resulted in hurtful questioning of my dedication and commitment.”

“At a district synod we were all asked to make small groups of three - five people to discuss something and not just meet with people we knew. I tried to join several groups which had spaces in and each time was told ‘no’ as they were saving a seat for someone or wanted a more mixed group as they knew me. In the end I gave up. I felt excluded in the church that I usually feel is a place where I belong. In the end I sat and wrote a reflection on how that felt, because although I hated it, I realise it’s an experience that is common for others in the church but isn’t really common for me as a minister. It’s easy to forget how exclusion feels in the church once I have become part of the ‘we’ who feel ‘we’ belong.”

“I wasn’t “out out” at church but just because it wasn’t something I felt the need to shout about because it’s who I’ve always been. I’ve never hidden it but no one’s ever asked. My friends knew, and it came up occasionally at youth group, so I assumed that the leaders knew. They never mentioned that God wouldn’t love me the same, so it never occurred to me that anyone of my faith wouldn’t love everyone regardless of their sexuality... when it was made obvious that I was wrong, I cried so much. So much hatred. So much fear. And for what? I wasn’t trying to seduce their wives? I wasn’t a sexual deviant preying on the vulnerable. I just wanted to be loved for who I was.”

“I stopped being a Reader and Communion Steward because the new, higher dais did not include a ramp and I need wheelchair access.”

“I am a member of a church on the boundary between the well-off part of town and a large housing estate. I became increasingly worried by the attitudes of church members and suggested the church could start outreach in the estate. Members expressed concerns about the effect outreach onto the estate would have on the church, using stereotype language like scroungers, benefits cheats, lazy unemployed. I was told, ‘We don’t want them in our church.’”

“I’ve been told, ‘By having you on the committee, you are helping us because we can tick the inclusivity box.’”

“It’s been a privilege to be at Conference but I would have liked to offer when I was younger. Nobody told me it was free to go there and although I would have taken the week off work as holiday, there was no way I could afford to stay away in a hotel for a week and

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it didn't occur to me that anybody else would cover my expenses!"

"There is always that sideways glance, that extra eye roving taking in what I am wearing or how I look, and no matter how hard I try, it is always up for scrutiny, more so than if a white person were wearing exactly the same. I feel that if I ever offer anything in church council or at any church meeting, there is always a downward glance, an intake of breath, a benign smile at the corner of lips, a lip service tolerance of 'allowing' me to speak, but my words are not heard, only the rhythm and pitch of my voice. I wish I didn't have to carry these feelings, I wish I didn't have to stay silent for fear of rocking the boat. I wish I didn't feel so alone in Church."

c) This strategy is needed because of the difference it will make

"I am dyslexic, and I find it very difficult to use either the screen or the normal print size copy of *Singing the Faith*. One of the churches where I am the minister, when I told them I was having problems, invested in large print copies of the hymn book, and put one in the vestry so I would always have it ready for services. It felt good to be cared about in that very practical way. Along with making sure there is always coloured paper in the photocopier for me, it shows how simple steps can make a big difference."

"I've been really impressed that my district's District Policy Committee has changed its meeting times so that I can join in. They didn't need to, at one level, but as I work it would have been impossible to go along to the meetings, even after I was voted in as a younger person. They've all put themselves out so that I can take part and I appreciate that."

"I have suffered from poor mental health for many years, and living in a small rural place, where everyone knows a lot about everyone else, can make me want to hide. However, I have found the church to be very supportive. When I have down days I can share with people and know that they will be praying. When I have good days, I can share that too and people will rejoice with me. The church community really has become my family. Even in lock-down they have only been a What's App group message away."

"This will demand, of us all, penitence and hope, patience and commitment. But what if our life together were to be imagined as an ever-changing dance, where new steps can be introduced, and new rhythms and movements explored; where each encounter with 'the other' was approached as an opportunity to experience enrichment as we discover new aspects of our shared humanity?"

"I've been given the opportunity and responsibility to ignite a young-person-led movement for other young people, 'empowering young leaders' in the district. The scheme has enabled me to become heavily involved and has included shaping opportunities for other

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16-23 year olds. My thoughts and ideas have been recognised and acted upon which has left me feeling strongly valued.”

“The difference it makes is amazing. My church has started a scheme for helping us to pool our money and now I can afford better food, even trips out occasionally (when COVID lets me of course!) because people are generous and they’ve found a way of helping me to share with others and to keep my self-respect.”

“God has not taken away my mental illness, but he has removed the sting from it by enabling me to have insight into my illness and manage it very well. My identity is not defined by my illness. I never call myself a schizophrenic, but I am proud to call myself a Christian. I think this is from God’s Holy Spirit living in me. He also gives me a wonderful sense of belonging to God’s family on earth.”

“Being part of the working group on Inclusion has, at times, moved me to happy tears. I don’t feel alone, I feel part of a movement that is bravely lifting heads towards God, being given the chance to speak out against injustice and for my words to have been heard and understood; for the nature of my heart to be felt, not the colour of my skin; for once in my UK Church life, I feel the warmth of hope in reality and not just silently in my heart, and I am desperate for this conversation to continue and bring about desperately needed change, so that no one ever has to feel burdened by exclusion.”

2. The story of getting to this point

2.1 “The Methodist Church has had a long history of being an advocate for social justice and challenging injustice”³. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee and the EDI task-group have been working together to develop this strategy for EDI work across the Methodist Church. From July 2020 until April 2021, five workstreams met for conversation between people of differing backgrounds, protected characteristics, and divergent view-points. The 36 members of those workstreams were selected from an open invitation, by interview, and deliberately represent some of the rich diversity of the Methodist Church.

These workstreams were:

1. Transformation - Renewing of Attitudes, Culture and System
2. Building Trust and Confidence

3 As acknowledged at the Council, March 2020, MC/20/52

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3. Setting the Bar
4. Positive Action
5. Scrutiny and Transparency

2.2 As has happened also in the *God in Love Unites Us* process, the bringing together of different Methodists, for conversation and listening, has been a deeply transformative process. The work of the workstreams has itself demonstrated the richness of life when diversity is celebrated. When we make the effort to learn from different life experiences, we discover what each can contribute to the whole life of the Church. Workstream participants have demonstrated a form of leadership which is less obvious than traditional models of leadership, but just as important in bringing about transformation. The work stream model has facilitated a type of leadership development which was not dependent on identified training courses or qualification, but simply a deep personal conviction to bring about justice, dignity and solidarity. We propose that this process becomes part of the learning and leadership culture within every sphere of Methodist Church life.

2.3 As the workstreams have met, a remarkable clarity has emerged that the Methodist Church needs to be transformed. 'Loving our neighbours as ourselves' needs to involve engaging deeply with all people, in all our differences. This theological method of meeting and conferring is central to our understanding and practice of what it means to be church⁴. We propose that in every sphere of Methodist Church life we consciously create opportunities for generative conversations in which we learn from one another and develop a culture of listening and being changed by one another's experience. This, we believe, is continuous with Methodist heritage. It is also vital for ministry and mission. It is in meeting with others that we recognise more of our own limitation and sinfulness. To refuse to engage with others whom we encounter, in the realities of their lives, is to refuse to engage with God. This sinfulness leads to racism, homophobia, coercive control and abuse of power, tragically manifest in a variety of prejudices and discrimination. The meeting with another person, in a spirit of openness and with a willingness to listen and to learn, is a moment of meeting with God.

2.4 The Church has always known the processes for bringing about the change that is needed. People's attitudes change as we are confronted with what is just, moral,

4 *The Nature of Oversight* (2005), 2.13, 2.15 and 2.16
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-reports/conference-reports-2005/>

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holy and perfect: with God. In that meeting the inadequacy, brokenness or evil of our own position is revealed and the desirability of the other is illuminated. The Church calls this a moment of conversion. As people responding to God, we are drawn into a fellowship with each other as we learn from one another and are changed as we become part of a community of faith. As disciples, together, we engage in the work of the Holy Spirit transforming society as we follow in the way of Jesus Christ. This is what this strategy recalls us to: a life of faith, rather than fear.

- 2.5 There has been a huge sadness in recognising how far the Methodist Church is from being a church of equity, despite our diversity, and this report proposes some mandatory steps to ensure that the Methodist Church embarks on a journey towards 'abundant life for all'. Confession is called for, and processes and procedures need to be diligently examined, in order to ensure that there is no longer discrimination, knowingly or unknowingly.
- 2.6 There has also been, throughout this process, huge hopefulness from recognising that the 2020 Conference has acknowledged this is the direction in which God is calling us. The actions proposed here as mandatory are so much more than good management and human relations practices, though they must include these. Rather they are a turning again to God as God is recognised in the image of others, together making up the Methodist Church in Britain, and moving towards becoming the church that God wants us to be.
- 2.7 As each person opens themselves to the change which God wants to bring, then a culture shift will be possible (for example, as with safeguarding). This strategy will be the means for the Methodist Church to move beyond the rhetoric of apology into a more determined and intentional mode of challenging all discrimination and to be a church of justice, dignity and solidarity, as God intends us to be.
- 2.8 The key issues and implications from each workstream are outlined below and the recommendations which emerged from this process were accepted by the Council at its meeting in March 2021. They are now recommended to the Conference.

WORKSTREAM 1: Transformation - Renewing of Attitudes, Culture and System.

Purpose: facilitating a sustained and long-term transformative process

Key issues:

- If the Methodist Church is to be a witness to God's love, if it is to embody that love as it is called upon to do, then we have no option but to embark

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on this journey of transformation – individually and collectively. It is not just about a requirement. It will also bring joy, life and the fresh air of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Enrichment will come from appreciating the gifts and graces of all and participating fully in God's life.

- Recognising the real trauma of exclusion and disadvantage experienced by many within the Church, there needs to be real understanding of the seismic nature of the transformation needed.
- While revising policies and instituting new mandatory actions will go some way towards setting the Church on a new path, systemic change cannot happen without attending to the people who make up the system and the way we relate to one another.
- Taking seriously attitudinal change means that the Church needs to review the way that it works, a way that is still determined by the privilege and power dynamics of an earlier generation. Put bluntly, the Church in too many places still operates with patterns devised by and for educated white men. Systemic change must, therefore, be explored alongside any cultural and attitudinal change.
- It is central that we gain understanding of this process as a spiritual quest and aspiration, and imagine a different future for the Church. This future will be a church with a renewed inclusive culture and one that truly embraces love and justice, individually and collectively.
- This is always a work in progress – we journey together, opening ourselves to being partners with God and with all whom God calls.
- Transformational change feeds into all points in the Church's life and systems, and we must continually question ourselves and our systems. Shifts and changes in our policies and organisational arrangements will be necessary as the values of this strategy are embedded, if the Methodist Church is to achieve its true purpose and calling.
- Each of us, every one of us, individually holds responsibility for transformation of the whole.⁵

What does this mean for the strategy?

1. Culture can be described as 'the way things are done around here' and involves shared values, beliefs and assumptions about how to behave and interact, how to make decisions and carry out activities. A review of these and of how the dynamics of power and privilege operate in the Methodist

5 This was the conclusion of *Belonging Together* in 2013, and this strategy report provides the mechanisms for putting this conclusion into practice.

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Church leads to the following recommendations about how 'things might be done' in a transformed culture:

2. **Challenging constructively:** creating a climate in which people are open to learning new ideas and understandings, norms, language, ways of relating, in order to be a safe and inclusive Church, involves making it possible for people to challenge others in a kind but clear way. 'Speaking the truth in love' is never an excuse to be nasty or discriminatory. Constructive challenge and constructive response are to be seen as part of the Kingdom journey, not as a negative.
3. **Valuing diversity:** moving to genuine inclusion involves people being fully included as they are (albeit with due regard for safeguarding), and not needing to conform with particular cultural norms in order to belong. It involves solidarity with people's issues and concerns, and these becoming the Church's concerns, too. Genuine love of diversity challenges us to get to know the people who are 'other' from ourselves, to challenge our own assumptions, and to listen and learn. A recognition of the value of diversity also shows itself in diverse and representative leadership.
4. **Taking responsibility:** each recognizing our own fears, prejudices, negative or damaging perceptions. Learning how our mental models, assumptions, and cultural understandings affect our perception of ourselves, others, and what is happening in church life and society involves education, and taking responsibility for questioning the impact on our practices. We need also to learn about our own power, and how to use it to enable and strengthen others, in ally-ship and mutuality - power that is for each other and not over each other.
5. **Enabling participation:** ensuring that all voices are heard, all stakeholders are engaged and that everyone in the Church understands how to access information and resources. Governance structures, where power is held, how it is used, the processes and policies in place, and the criteria for appointments, all need to be transparent and communicated clearly in ways that are accessible to all.
6. The vision is for a Church which has moved away from patterns devised by the privilege and power dynamics of an earlier generation, and thus a Church in which diversity is reflected in all aspects of leadership - in local church, circuit, district and connexional life. The renewed culture will be one which is shaped by justice and grace, open to learning from each other, inclusive and respectful, and in which power is shared, thus enabling and equipping all to love and serve.

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WORKSTREAM 2: Building Trust and Confidence

Purpose: building trust and confidence throughout the Methodist Church and in the wider community, by working together and in solidarity with people who have experienced discrimination in the Church.

Key issues:

- All members of the Church need to be able to say 'I can see me' in images and stories of the life of the Church which reflect their own experience
- The voices of people who have suffered discrimination must be listened to and heard, empowering people and informing decision-making with a view to achieving real and lasting transformation.
- Through this process, the Church will need to give assurance that barriers inhibiting full participation in the life of the Church will be identified and removed, including the ongoing review of practices and procedures to see where the Church needs to change.

What does this mean for the strategy?

1. The systems and procedures of the Methodist Church must be more accessible, transparent and accountable, in responding to people who have experienced exclusion, discrimination, prejudice, bullying, harassment or abuse.
2. There must be a robust protection and support system for people who are brave enough to come forward.
3. The ability of the Church to build trust and confidence in the vision of this strategy will be essential for ensuring full engagement and participation of all members.

WORKSTREAM 3: Setting the Bar

Purpose: to develop and implement Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard Requirements for the Connexion, as the beginning of our journey towards being an equitable and just church.

Key issues:

- A framework is needed for developing more inclusive structures and processes, measuring performance, ensuring improvement in our relationships and enrichment through diversity.

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- These standards need to provide a mechanism for sharing best practice and mutual support, and consistent experience across the Church's life.
- We need data to understand the make-up of our church, to be able to challenge churches about their representation of the diversity of church members, and to work towards churches which are fully engaged with the communities around them.
- Enhanced competence within EDI skill-sets for lay and ordained members of the Methodist Church will provide more efficient use of connexional resources, including the time of the EDI Adviser.

What does this mean for the strategy?

1. Every area of church life needs to undergo an initial EDI audit or assessment against agreed standards, which in turn will bring change to life and programmes across the Connexion.
2. The Statement of Intent and a way of assessing progress from this point into the future.
3. These standards need to create the essential framework for the delivery of EDI, ensuring our adherence to legislation and, more importantly, will provide a means for beginning to embed EDI across the Connexion, as we are changed by our recognition of God's unlimited love for all people.
4. It is anticipated that the joy of belonging to a diverse and equitable Church will be a conversion experience for many.

WORKSTREAM 4: Positive Action

Purpose: to address the issue of under-representation within leadership roles across the Church.

Key issues:

- Developing and implementing 'Positive Action' initiatives under the Equality Act 2010 provides a range of measures which can be lawfully undertaken by the Methodist Church to encourage and train people from under-represented groups, to achieve greater representation at leadership levels.
- Positive action can assist in overcoming disadvantage when competing with other applicants and can help facilitate increased applications from under-represented groups for leadership roles.
- While Methodist Council appointments follow some of the Positive Action initiatives listed under 8) b) below, many Methodist appointments across the Connexion do not.

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- God calls people of all backgrounds and diversities, into all kinds of roles within the Church, and yet we have not taken care to be sure that people are then supported as they respond to that call.
- It is sad, but true, that justice, dignity and solidarity do not just happen. Communities need to work towards treating each other justly and engendering respect and true unity. This requires positive action. On one level this action can be to break down the barriers into posts and employment within our church for people from protected characteristic groups. On the other, we need Positive Action to challenge the attitudes, speech and actions of every Methodist member.

What does this mean for the strategy?

1. Every piece of communication needs to be checked for cultural and linguistic sensitivity, and to be communicated in as appropriate and as accessible a way as possible
2. The Methodist Church must repeatedly speak out against all forms of discrimination. We need to be clear and unambiguous that to be a Methodist member is to commit to justice, dignity and solidarity.
3. Individuals will need to be open to a change of heart, mind and/or actions.
4. Our *Positive Working Together* initiative strives to reshape the Church into a place where all can flourish and celebrate being God's creation in relationship with others. Positive Action to challenge and remove barriers to opportunity is an extension of this work.

WORKSTREAM 5: Scrutiny and Transparency

Purpose: to enable good practice around scrutiny and transparency across the Methodist Church so that all people can see that we are committed to change and to full and equal participation of all members and staff.

Key issues:

- Robust scrutiny will, whilst ensuring adherence to EDI minimum standards, also encourage and guide best practice.
- Transparency is about easy access to information which is not mediated by a gate keeper.
- It must be recognised that not all churches or members/adherents are online, in some cases because they not computer literate, in others because 5% of the country is not guaranteed the investment from government in super-fast broadband and that connectivity issues make it unrealistic to rely on web resources

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What does this mean for the strategy?

1. Congregations, Circuits and Districts will be affirmed for the things which they are doing well and this will be celebrated. They will also be assisted in planning how to develop their inclusivity further.
2. Every aspect of Church life will be explained, and procedures will be transparent to all, regardless of language, ability and internet connectivity.
3. EDI scrutiny methods and guidelines will need to be developed, published in a variety of forms, and widely available. They will need to be used for all future connexional policy and practice development
4. Current practices will need to be audited with a view to action or remedy where needed
5. Every Church needs to display the Methodist Church in Britain website contact details.

3. Recommendations

These recommendations have emerged organically from the combinations of people meeting in the workstreams, who were all passionate about the unconditional love of God for all people, and what this means in practice.

R1. The Conference commits itself to systemic, structural and cultural change so that the following recommendations can be achieved.

R2. To encourage and support the Church in celebrating diversity, the following will be developed

a) **A culture of Festivals and Celebrations**, providing examples and resources to support this, in order to encourage each church in celebrating and sharing of good practice.

This will enable Methodists:

- to share life experience and good practice
- to exchange ideas
- to develop future plans for affirmation of diverse cultures
- for self-scrutiny and empowerment to develop this work

A simple resource for 'how to' become engaged in, or to organise, such events will be produced and made available, with examples of where this has worked well already.

b) A pilot **Methodist 'affirmation' scheme**, to encourage development in this strategy across the Connexion as an affirmation of what has been achieved

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as this strategy progresses. This scheme will be a facility to capture good practice, encouraging churches, Circuits and Districts to go forward. All Churches will have their strengths and this will be acknowledged (examples could include: dementia- friendly, autism-friendly, LGBT+ friendly, 'Church at the Margins', warm welcome, open conversations). A pilot might, for example, include the use of a QR code which could be scanned outside the church, during the week, allowing people to access the details of how that particular church aims to be inclusive, helping a person decide whether they felt that church would be suitable for them. Each church will be challenged to demonstrate how it is inclusive and also how it proposes to develop according to this strategy. The scheme will be reviewed on a regular basis and will include a structure to help develop plans for the future as well as recognising what has been achieved.

- c) **A thorough review of language** used in communications and worship. In communication, this will cover both how we explain ourselves beyond the Church and how we communicate within the Church. In worship, this will include liturgy and hymnody, with new inclusive material being developed, so that our collective worship experience is celebratory of the rich diversity of our Methodist life.

We will aim:

- to use inclusive language
 - to avoid 'us' and 'them'
 - to use terms and pronouns that people use about themselves
 - to be alert to language and metaphors that are derogatory
 - to avoid using language in a way which marks people as different where it is not relevant
 - to recognise that our use of language often reflects unconscious prejudice and being open to being challenged / gently challenging one another
- d) **A narrative process** for recording the stories of what happens through this EDI paradigm shift, so that the story of transformation can be shared.

The aim will be to track the journey of the Church into a more inclusive and equitable future. It is hoped that this will result in the writing and production of an appropriate publication both as a record and as a lasting legacy of the process. This will be in addition to the provision of material through online methods. A participative research project will be developed alongside the work of this strategy, helping to build trust and confidence in the process.

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Contributions from the wider church will be collated, including stories, pictures, poems, hymns and narratives, giving opportunities for all to share their experiences in a way that feels comfortable and natural to each individual. This will become a resource that can be used with local congregations and will also provide accessible material for work with children and young people.

R3. To enable transformation through conversation and deeper encounter with difference, the following will be put in place:

Gatherings to encourage real conversations and to explore the nature of the transformation and 'paradigm shift' that is needed in the Church.

- a) Some symposia will be hosted by different teams across the Connexion, facilitated by the Susanna Wesley Foundation, in partnership some of the Learning Network staff, to create opportunities for the sharing of deeply personal experiences in an environment of openness to change. These encounters will help participants to engage personally with what it means to be a Church committed to Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. Participants will engage in dialogue and generative conversation as a means to personal and collective conversion and learning. They will begin to uncover the 'system' and appreciate their own role within it. In those symposia where sufficient time is committed, there will be discernment of those points/places in the Church in their contexts which are susceptible to and requiring of change. Participants will begin to understand how to give that change shape, coherence and direction, equipping them to go back into their own contexts and take action there. More informal gatherings for the same purposes will be encouraged across the Connexion.

These gatherings will be supported by resources available via the website.

- b) **Learning and development opportunities and resources for partners who will facilitate** and support different approaches to transformation at the local and regional level.

R4. The following systems will be established for listening to and supporting people suffering discrimination:

- a) **A Discrimination Response System**, so that people can disclose situations of discrimination or exclusion, and be supported as it is decided how to respond to this actively.

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This process will encourage and enable people to disclose incidents of exclusion, discrimination, bullying, harassment or abuse for any reason. In the process people will be assured that they will be supported, empowered and accompanied in any decisions and actions that may be required to bring justice and healing. This scheme will work alongside the Safeguarding team and draw on safeguarding expertise. Disclosures will be made to a central point (dedicated telephone line/email address/website form) and will be followed up by a trained advisor who will be able to hear the disclosure, offer an affirming response, and give advice as to what support and further action is available. Support may include pastoral support from individuals identified in consultation with the victim, and/or counselling provided by an appropriate agency. In this system, the Methodist Church will take responsibility for the response in order to address issues of exclusion or discrimination. Further action may include, if appropriate, a restorative justice process undertaken with the perpetrator, or a complaint raised through the complaints and discipline process. In the event of a criminal disclosure, this action would involve the police. All support and further action will be decided in consultation with the survivor to ensure that the process is survivor-focused and that they are empowered to be in control of their experience. This system will be piloted during 2021-22.

- b) A Personal Responsibility Covenant**, so that people who have offended by discrimination or exclusion, can learn and change their behaviour in line with this strategy. This tool will be for use within churches, circuits and districts with those people who have breached the expectations of this strategy. It will offer them the opportunity to accept and address their situation, to learn from others, and to change their behaviour in line with this strategy. This process will support the individuals concerned in their journey towards taking responsibility for their part in a just, equitable and inclusive church. This system will also be piloted during 2021-22, in conjunction with the Discrimination Response System.
- c) Tracking of offending individuals and churches/church bodies**, so that repeat offences are avoided within Methodist systems.

In order to prevent repeated offences of discrimination we will design and implement a system for 'tracking' individuals, churches or circuits who cause offence, belittle people or act in exclusive ways. As we develop the processes and practices needed for this, current GDPR and safeguarding policies will be upheld, including appropriate permissions.

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- d) **A Critical Incident Resource**, so that the Methodist Church can respond to incidents of an EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) nature in a way that supports the person or people offended against. Acknowledging the excellent work which already happens on behalf of the Methodist Church in responding to some particular incidents, it is recommended that a resource be developed, with training available, for people needing to respond to critical incidents in this particular area of work. The aim would be to provide a structured and consistent approach in supporting the Church in responding to the people who have been victims in these cases, which may be local or national incidents or disasters. This Critical Incident Resource is needed to respond in a timely and meaningful manner both from the Church and, where appropriate, with partners within broader society, in order to support those effected.
- e) A pilot of a **Truth and Reconciliation process** covering various contexts of church life, so that we can hear the truth about discrimination and exclusion, and begin the processes of reconciliation and transformation of structures and procedures. In order to tackle the injustices found within the systems and procedures of the church, this will be a process to ensure that all the various memories and experiences are listened to and heard. This listening process will acknowledge failures in the systems and procedures of the Church and enable the Church to do things better, moving forward into justice, dignity and solidarity. We will involve representatives of the Church, meeting with people who have found the systems to be discriminatory, for a conversation in order to speak truth to power and bring healing, justice and transformation of those systems and procedures.

The staged timing and the details of the process will be designed during the first phase of the work of this strategy. We anticipate that the process will be facilitated by an appointed group of skilled professionals, seeking to answer questions around power and conflict such as, “How is prejudice challenged?” “What can be learned?” “What needs to change in the future?”

Over time the process will reach every area of church life e.g. leadership (representation within the Church), ministries (preaching and worship leading, candidating, training, probationers, stationing), finance (distribution of Methodist resources, grants), Local Church, Circuit and District. We will aim to offer support (chaplancy) to all involved in the process.

- f) **EDI Support processes**, working with existing support groups to develop the best ways of listening to, and learning from, the experiences of those who have suffered discrimination and exclusion

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Recognising that the Methodist Church has failed to prevent and to challenge discrimination, we recommend that, in conversation with existing support groups, we develop:

- clear processes for sign-posting people to the support which is available

Acknowledging the excellent support offered by a range of existing support and advocacy groups we will work to discover ways of learning from the experience of the members of these groups. We will also identify, and respond to, the gaps that may exist in support provision.

- ways of learning from people who have suffered exclusion or discrimination

As the work of this strategy develops into further phases, we commit to developing consistent ways of listening to, and learning from, those people whose lives have been affected by exclusion and discrimination, and from the existing support groups.

- 'Solidarity Circles' with online meetings

These will be a way of the Methodist Church supporting people in different diversities of the Church's life through offering regular opportunities to meet, to support one another, and to raise with relevant Church leaders the concerns that need to be addressed.

R5. The following mandatory requirements will be developed, as the first place where we 'set the bar' at the beginning of this next phase:

- a) The introduction of components of mandatory EDI training** within Methodist leadership training offered to Methodists. This training will cover:

- 1) Anti-Racism Training
- 2) LGBT Equality Training
- 3) Disability Equality Training
- 4) Gender Equality Training
- 5) Unconscious Bias Training
- 6) Age-related Bias Training
- 7) Training related to other areas of exclusion (eg survivors of abuse, or experiences of childlessness)

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As this training is developed we will take care to listen to people who have suffered discrimination, and will find safe ways of enabling them to share their experience in order for the whole Church to learn.

- b) The adoption of the six ‘positive actions’ from the Equality and Human Rights Commission for all appointments within the Methodist Church,** following the lead of the Methodist Council and then ensuring this is implemented in Circuits and Local Churches within the next phase. These steps will be mandatory for all ‘roles’ in the Methodist Church in each area of Methodist life (local church, circuit, district and connexional appointments).

*The Equality and Human Rights Commission*⁶ positive action steps in the ‘workplace’ are:

- 1) placing job advertisements to target particular groups, to increase the number of applicants from that group
 - 2) including statements in job advertisements to encourage applications from under-represented groups, such as ‘we welcome female applicants’
 - 3) offering training or internships to help certain groups to get opportunities or progress at work, including online training and, where appropriate, in different languages
 - 4) offering shadowing or mentoring to groups with particular needs, taking cultural differences into account
 - 5) hosting an open day specifically for under-represented groups to encourage them to get into a particular field
 - 6) favouring the job candidate from an under-represented group, where two candidates are ‘as qualified as’ each other
- c) Pilot systems for mentoring, reverse-mentoring, shadowing and ‘placement opportunities’.** An example would be to facilitate shadowing and coaching opportunities to work alongside District Chairs for a fixed period of time to gain exposure to the day-to-day duties and challenges of the job.
- d) A guide (*Methodism and How to Join In*) which explains everything in accessible formats,** including a published format as well as online materials, and a broad range of methods of augmentative/alternative communication.

In order to make it possible for the broadest diversity of people to play their full part in the Church’s life a Guide will be created with short paragraphs

6 <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/employers-what-positive-action-workplace>, accessed 26.1.21.

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about every aspect of Methodism, from how to get involved in Church Council or be a Door Steward to what the President does, and everything in between. It will also include alternative routes for people to explore if they are blocked in one direction. Images will need to show diversity. The Guide will need to be readily available to any member or adherent who wants it, in accessible ways. The language will need to be simple and the theology presented and explained, aware of the diversity of educational background and life experiences of Methodists. Attention will be paid to font type, size and colours.

Recognising the rich diversity of Methodist life in Britain, there will be different forms of print and languages - including for example: Tamil, Shona, Farsi, Welsh, etc. identifying the languages which are widely spoken by congregations and ensuring that materials are translated. The translations will need to be well sign-posted. There should also be a filmed version with a menu of short videos.

R6. *The following processes should be developed for measuring progress of the implementation of this strategy:*

- a) The collection and use of EDI data** to understand where we are starting from and to begin to measure progress

EDI data (for local church, circuit, district and connexional life) will be collected (beginning with connexional and district life) because without them we cannot properly measure or manage statistical progress. We also need data to help us establish where we need to improve our performance in order to be a church of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. These data are crucial as a 'bench mark' against which to review what changes have been achieved and to check what changes are necessary. Collecting data will also be a tool for conversations about why these measurements are important. This data collection is crucial in our commitment to this strategy.

- b) An EDI impact assessment tool** for Methodists to audit and measure the EDI impact of our activity and decision-making in any context

This is a tool by which to measure progress and is needed in all spheres of Methodist life, local, circuit, district and Methodist Council. A model is included in Appendix 3.

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It will:

- provide monitoring and auditing templates
- enable/encourage more appointment of lay people to be responsible for admin and all aspects of monitoring and auditing, alongside ordained colleagues (potentially including both Safeguarding and EDI work)

At present there is no structured or consistent Methodist process to analyse policy or practice, or to protect against discrimination or disadvantage of any group of people. The development of an assessment tool and agreed process for audit and monitoring, will support adherence to agreed Church values, theology, mandatory equality legislation and standards found within this strategy.

- c) The revision and expansion of the EDI Toolkit** as a manual and resource with which to measure our progress with this strategy.

A revised version of the EDI Toolkit will produced (with a new module on Transgender, inter-sex, and non-binary experience of human diversity) during the connexional year 2021-22. There will also be extra material to help Methodists measure their progress with this strategy. The EDI Toolkit will need to be produced in many formats and 'languages' in order to be accessible.

- R7. EDI Officers will be appointed in every sphere of the Church's life, to support the implementation of this strategy, and to help with the monitoring of its progress.***

Each Circuit, and District or region will appoint an EDI Officer (either paid by the District or region, as part of their existing role, or as an appropriate volunteer). To ensure this strategy is effective, the EDI Officers will support its implementation within their sphere of Methodist Church life.

- The Circuit, District and regional EDI Officers will be supported and resourced in their work, including the opportunity to be part of an online network for people in EDI Officer roles.
- As part of their mission planning local churches will also be encouraged to appoint EDI Officers
- Circuits will be encouraged to appoint EDI Advocates or EDI teams, to work alongside EDI Officers, in a voluntary or paid capacity.

For a draft EDI Officer's Role see Appendix 4.

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- In order to ensure this work is effective in every area of Methodist life, an EDI item should appear on each Methodist agenda, asking “Do our mission and ministry reflect our Methodist commitment to being a fully inclusive Methodist Church, in line with the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity?”

R8. The Faith and Order Committee should be directed to review its ways of working in the light of this strategy, and to report back to the Council in January 2022.

R9. The Council should appoint a Shadow Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Committee for the year 2021/2022, to facilitate the beginning of the JDS strategy and establish the terms of reference for the permanent JDS Committee beyond 2022.

R10. The shadow JDS Committee should report to the Council in October 2021 on an Implementation Plan.

4. Proposals for future Governance of EDI Work (recommendations 9 and 10 above)

Background

The Methodist Council at its March 2020 meeting instructed the EDI Committee and the EDI Task Group (EDI TG) to work together on a final wording of the ‘Inclusive Methodist Church’ (IC) statement and an implementation plan and to bring a final report to the Council in April 2021.

The Council appointed the EDI Committee as constituted for a final year to August 2021.

Proposal for a Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Shadow Committee

It is proposed that the JDS Shadow Committee (SC) is appointed to continue the work of the current combined EDI Committee and Task Group known as the Inclusive Church Implementation Group (ICIG) until August 2022. Then the future JDS Committee, the replacement for the ICIG, shall be appointed from September 2022.

It is acknowledged that continuity and the retention of ‘collective corporate memory’ is important. Therefore, it is proposed that the membership of the JDS Shadow Committee is made up of:

- a. The workstream (WS) conveners or a member of the WS

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- b. Current members nominated by the Methodist Council.
- c. The chair and two members, for both the Shadow JDS Committee and the permanent JDS Committee be appointed through open advertisement.

The principal tasks of the Shadow JDS Committee will be to:

1. Provide a coordinated plan and ongoing support, interpretation and direction to the implementers of the strategy, recognising that this is a high-level strategy report, prioritising, as necessary, and identifying any risks to successful implementation.
2. Utilise the considerable knowledge and experience gained in developing this strategy. Workstream members will continue to provide advice and quality assurance input, to assist the JDS Shadow Committee in the implementation of this strategy.
3. Work with the EDI Adviser and the Implementation Officer who will support in the implementation of this strategy.
4. Continue to motivate and maintain the momentum, recognising that significant progress has been achieved.
5. Propose terms of reference and first year work plan for the JDS Committee.
6. Nominate six people to the Conference to represent EDI concerns (SO 102(1)(i)(g)).

The Conference is therefore asked to agree to the continued suspension of Standing Order 336 and to direct the Council to work with the Law and Polity Committee to bring a draft revision of that Standing Order and related Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.

In response to Notice of Motion 2020/103, the Council established a scrutiny group of three members of the Council to provide scrutiny and assurance on the implementation of the strategy.

Budget: Work is still in progress, in conversation with the Strategy and Resources Team, on the budget implications for this work. Where possible, recommendations will be implemented without additional cost (ie through the work of those in Circuits and Districts giving freely of their time) but some parts of the programme will need financial resources.

Finally: We call upon every Methodist, in considering this report, to think about yourself, your own prejudices and also about how this strategy will change the exclusion that some people, including people we love as well as people we don't even know, may have experienced in the past. We call upon you also, to share this vision for a future in which we journey in justice, dignity and solidarity and to commit yourself to taking action towards the work of God as found in this strategy.

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***RESOLUTIONS

- 56/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 56/2. The Conference adopts the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity as set out in the Report.**
- 56/3. The Conference commends the Report to the Connexion and directs that supporting resources be produced.**
- 56/4. The Conference adopts the terms of reference for the Shadow Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee for 2021/2022 (as at section 4 of the report), and suspends SO 336 for the connexional year 2021/2022.**
- 56/5. The Conference directs the Council to continue its work on the terms of reference for a new Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee, and to bring proposals to the 2022 Conference.**

Appendix 1

Workstream Members

Acknowledgement and explanation:

The ICIG would like to acknowledge here our heart-felt thanks to the members of the Workstreams who have given generously of their time and life experience. They have shown a real commitment to the changes which need to be made and have modelled, by their honesty, openness and willingness to listen, the kind of approach which will make this culture shift possible. The work they have each done has contributed to the whole however, and wherever, it has been reported in this document.

Workstream 1: Transformation - Renewing of Attitudes, Culture and System

Ermal Kirby (Facilitator), Adrian Roux, Delyth Liddell (WS2), Gauri Taylor-Nayar, Jean Ware, Jo Henderson-Merrygold, Katie Deadman, Megan Seneque, Ruth Yorke, Sue Miller, Bevan Powell (EDI Adviser)

Workstream 2: Building Trust and Confidence

Delyth Liddell (Facilitator), Catherine Bird, Jonathan Miller, Karen Allen, Linda Robotham, Stephanie Njeru, Susan Spencer, Bevan Powell (EDI Adviser)

Workstream 3: Setting the Bar

Irene McKay (Facilitator), Bonni-Belle Pickard, Christopher Collins, Grace Gava, Karl Rutledge, Ermal Kirby (WS1), Val Turner (WS5), Bevan Powell (EDI Adviser)

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Workstream 4: Positive Action

Charity Nzegwu (Facilitator), David Hardman, Gerwyn Davies, Jennifer Layburn, Jill Marsh, Irene McKay (WS3), Bevan Powell (EDI Adviser)

Workstream 5: Scrutiny and Transparency

Val Turner (Facilitator), Catherine Hutton, Charity Nzegwu (WS4), Jon Bellfield, Jon Miller, Ruth Levine, Sydney Samuel Lake, Bevan Powell (EDI Adviser)

Full ICIG Group

Bala Gnanapragasam, Bevan Powell, Charity Nzegwu, Delyth Liddell, Ermal Kirby, Inderjit Bhogal, Irene McKay, Jean Ware, Michaela Youngson, Sonia Hicks, Stephen Poxon, Val Turner.

Appendix 2

Personal Responsibility Covenant (PRC) for the Methodist Church Remedial Actions

If there has been a breach of the Methodist Church's Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity at local church, circuit, district or Connexional Team level, with acceptance that there is a PRC situation, there will be a range of options available to assist individuals in achieving agreed acceptable behaviour. These may include:

- A period of specific training which may include coaching in a particular area
- A period of supported reflective practice, which may incorporate a mentoring arrangement
- Access to assistance through EDI Officers and other personal support services within and beyond the Methodist Church.
- A specific piece of review work to identify the cause/s of the breach of EDI policy which could include a review of a particular 'protocol' and the church's policy or approach to a particular issue
- Review of the appropriateness of the role of each individual identified as needing to accept a PRC
- Independent supportive mediation
- Further actions to address the situation e.g. develop specific training package or undertake communication / engagement sessions for all who were in any way related to the situation which arose
- Other locally resourced solutions, with circuit EDI agreement

The EDI officer will need to consult to consider how best the appropriate support and improvement may be achieved, in relation to both the individual and the church. It might be that more than one remedial action is offered to the individual and/or instigated by the church. The success of the standard operating procedure will depend on discerning what

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will be most helpful in each situation. Relationships with other EDI Officers and networks can offer helpful shared experiences.

Where a person refuses to engage with the process or fails to demonstrate an improvement, despite support and remedial action, use of the church's disciplinary processes may be necessary in accordance with the CPD.

Appendix 3

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) explanation

Beyond the Church, Equality Impact Assessments have been used extensively throughout the Public Sector in the UK to assist organisations in ensuring that their decision-making, policies, strategies, practice or activity do not discriminate or disadvantage an individual or group of people in terms of their protected characteristics. An EIA is conducted when producing new policy or strategy, and provides evidence that the various facets of EDI have been taken into account. An EIA will ensure that the potential effects of a policy/activity is understood by assessing its impact on different groups of people. Potential adverse impacts are identified and removed or mitigated. Transparency and evidenced based decision-making is achieved by using the EIA process.

Traditional EIAs are grounded in terms of adherence to legislation. However, the Methodist Church goes beyond legislation and is formed by values and theology. As a result, the Church will develop a hybrid tool which will have at its core the values and theology of the Methodist Church, against which new policies and practise can be assessed (referred to as EDI Impact Assessment Tool above in Recommendation 6b).

Appendix 4

EDI Officer's Role Description: suggested DRAFT

- 1) To support churches/Circuits/Districts/Methodist Council in the implementation of this strategy.
- 2) To assist the development of strategy and policy-making, and decision-making within their sphere of church life, particularly by listening to the people worst effected by any bad practice.
- 3) To 'sign off' any assessment that has been carried out in relation to various pieces of work.
- 4) To be aware of, and familiar with, the processes and tools for use in this strategy, including The Discrimination Response System, the Truth and Reconciliation process, and the Personal Responsibility Covenant.
- 5) To ensure that disclosures, and responses, are 'tracked' so that churches are not able to continue discrimination in the same way in the future.
- 6) To monitor whether churches and Circuits are living out this EDI strategy.

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Appendix 5

EDI Theological Underpinning

1. It is the Church's intention to value every human being as part of God's creation and the whole people of God. At the heart of the Methodist community is a deep sense of the place of welcome, hospitality and openness which demonstrates the nature of God's grace and love for all. Our church communities are called to be places where the transformational love of God is embodied and life in all its fullness is a gift which is offered to all people. There are no distinctions based on race, gender, disability, age, wealth or sexuality, or any discrimination associated with this gift. Yet, it is important to recognise that this does not mean there are no boundaries or limits to the Church's inclusivity and hospitality. The boundaries which exist in the Church enable the Church to remain faithful to its identity as the body of Christ and to seek to be a safe space for those who participate in its communal life. Ever open to the revelation of God, the Church, with prayerful discernment, continues to reflect on where these boundaries appropriately lie and how it embodies the love and grace of God. God loves all people unconditionally, and we seek to live out that unconditional love in every part of church life.
2. Issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, though critical in both contemporary theological reflection and the witness of the Church, cannot be derived easily from the Bible. The Bible is the record of God's dealings with humankind, consisting of narratives through which we discern God's nature and purposes. This means that theological ideas emerge in particular cultural contexts, though they are not necessarily bound by them. One cannot easily extract principles from isolated incidents or sayings. The Bible is not specific on matters of equality, and contains stories of discrimination against people, of enslavement, sexual violence against women, and the equating of disability with sin. Yet we can also discern broader themes emerging from the narratives that issue a severe challenge to these stories. Recognition of the challenges involved in interpreting Scripture, alongside recognition of the rich resources it provides, leads not only to the need for continuing study and reflection regarding issues of equality, diversity and inclusion; but also for challenge where the inappropriate use of Scripture leads to discriminatory attitudes and practices. Nonetheless, themes emerge from the Biblical narratives that offer guidance for the Church's engagement with contemporary culture.
3. The traditions and history of the Church reveal changing perspectives and consensuses over the inclusion or exclusion of particular peoples in different ways and for different reasons, and often the Church has not spoken with a single voice. There are biblical passages that deal with God's election of particular people, and the Church's views on slavery and the ordination of women, for example, have seen considerable change. Therefore, the Church's collective understanding of God's

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purpose and truth has changed over time. The Church is a pilgrim Church, and we expect that scripture, tradition, reason, and experience will continue to reveal truth as the Methodist people continue to reflect on these issues in all areas of Church life and as part of their discipleship. The following strands of biblical, Methodist, and the broader Christian thought offer some resources for further reflection.

Theological Resources for Reflection

4. Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-7), and are loved by God. Each one of us is unique and valued by God, and thus the intrinsic worth of every human being is to be upheld. Such worth is afforded through the act of being created, and is not related to the behaviour of human beings, nor to their stage in life from birth to death.
5. Jesus, the image of God (Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3) is the fulfilment of the Scriptures. He shared our human experience. He was rejected, betrayed and put to death on the cross. His death and resurrection is God's ultimate statement of grace and supreme act of inclusion.
6. In his ministry, Jesus showed God's love by his openness to all people, including reaching out to those who were marginalised in his day. He touched untouchable people such as lepers (Mark 1:39-45), restored those whom society had banished to unclean or marginal places (Mark 5:1-20), healed others whose physical impairments marginalized them (Mark 10: 46-52), proclaimed blessings for the poor (Luke 6:20), and forgave men and women whose perceived conduct had caused outrage (Luke 7:36-50, Luke 19:1-10, John 7:53 -8:11).
7. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus a new community was created which experienced already a foretaste of the divine life, intended by God for all humankind. Sometimes this life was described as salvation, sometimes, especially in John's gospel (3:15), as eternal life, the life of God's new age. The effects of God's salvation transcended the lives of individual people. A new society was inaugurated in which old boundaries and divisions were, at the very least, recast in new ways, and bonds were cemented through the action of the Holy Spirit. Strangers became friends (Acts 2:42-7) and people understood their relationships to others new ways (John 19:25-7, Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:10).
8. It was the witness of the early Church, affirmed in Paul's letter to the Galatians (Galatians 3:28) that there is longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, because we are one in Jesus Christ. Yet the Church took time to work through the consequences of this, and it continues to do so today. As time went on, old divisions would be questioned, and even broken down, (Ephesians 2:11-16); others, though

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exposed now to the new light of the Gospel, would take much longer and yet more, still unknown to or unacknowledged by New Testament writers, were to be challenged by the Gospel in centuries to come (such as slavery or the role of women).

9. The Church owes its being to the grace of God in Christ. From the very first the Church understood its true life to be Christ-centred, and therefore God-centred. The diversity of identity and gifts give to God's people is not an end in itself, but is for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ. Galatians 3:28-29 reminds us that our unity is not found in our intrinsic nature but through our common redemption in Jesus Christ. If one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers. We acknowledge the necessity of working with those with whom we disagree, or whose Christian experience lies outside our own and makes demands on our behaviour, as a discipline of the Body of Christ. As the Body of Christ, the Church is called to worship God and to witness to God's saving grace to humankind. As such, it is called to exist not only for its own sake, but for the life of the world.
10. Christ is at the centre of the Church's life, through the gift of the Spirit. The Church in each place is a gathering together, in the Spirit, of people from all sorts of background and at all stages of faith, to be one community of mutual sharing, mutual service and mutual edification; praising God together, searching the scriptures and sharing in the Lord's Supper. Relationships in any community are a crucial barometer of its health and well-being. That is especially true of a church, since it is called to be a sign, a foretaste and an agent of God's kingdom for everyone. The phrase "each other" occurs many times in the New Testament letters: "accept each other" (Romans 15:7), "encourage each other", (1 Thessalonians 4:18), "... putting up with one another's failings..." (Ephesians 4:2). The list could go on, but all these commands are expressions of the "new commandment" which Jesus gave, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:33). Such loving relationship is only possible as a reflection of the unconditional love of God and the discipline of loving our neighbour as ourselves embodied in the working of the local church in its community.
11. "In later Trinitarian doctrine, (anticipated in the New Testament), Christians, in differing ways, have also found a model for the life of the Church. For example, to speak of God as a loving communion of three co-equal 'persons' suggests that the Church should be a community of mutual support and love in which there is no superiority or inferiority. Or, we may speak, as the Nicene Creed does, of the Holy Spirit "proceeding" from the Father (and the Son), indicating how the outgoing, all-embracing love of God for God's creation flows through the Son and the Spirit. Such an understanding of the Trinity is authenticated when the Church shares in God's mission to the world." (*Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, §2.1.9)

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12. Methodism understands itself to be a connexional Church. Connexionalism is identified in terms of belonging, mutuality and interdependence. All Christians are essentially linked to one another; no Local Church is or can be an autonomous unit complete in itself. At the heart of such interdependent relationships is conversation (which implies a resolve to listen as well as to speak, to overcome differences and move towards shared understandings). The practice of Christian conferring characterizes the way in which Methodists make decisions, theologially reflect, and enter into relationships within and beyond the Church.
13. The Methodist Church, drawing on its Arminian heritage, emphasises the universality of God's grace, freely offered to all peoples irrespective of their condition. Within Methodism all are welcome in the broadest sense. The emphasis is on God's grace for all, without any exceptions; and transformational possibilities in personal and relational life for all, beyond what can be expected or predicted. It is an invitation to which all are invited to respond. Hospitality, openness and welcome to all are at the heart of what it means to be a Methodist. The Church strives to be an inclusive community, but at the same time acknowledges the need for discipline and, in extreme circumstances, the exclusion of those who damage the integrity of the Church or obstruct human flourishing. Accordingly, a theology of hospitality involves establishing the boundaries to this hospitality, and in particular ensuring that they are constructed consonant with divine grace and not our own prejudices. Whilst seeking to manifest God's unconditional love, churches are not so much places of unconditional welcome but of a more radical, robust hospitality that offers the gospel invitation in ways that are just and safe, affirm the dignity of all, and have integrity.
14. An emphasis on hospitality also requires examination of the power dynamics in the guest-host relationship, including attention to the extent to which a host community is willing to be changed by its 'guests' and whether it is only prepared to offer hospitality on its own terms. An over-emphasis on offering hospitality can mean that consideration of what it means to be a guest is neglected. Local Churches are called to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ through both offering and receiving hospitality, in all of their relationships, and through how they interact with the other bodies and communities in their particular contexts.
15. The Wesleyan doctrine of perfect love leads us to seek, in every aspect of our individual and corporate lives, growth in holiness and grace. We seek relationships that go beyond toleration into a deeper appreciation of how God is working in the other person. The holiness of the Church has two dimensions. First, it denotes the Church's standing before God: the Church is holy simply because it belongs to God, and it is entirely dependent on the gift of God's Spirit. This is why the praise of God is the Church's fundamental vocation and characteristic activity. Second, the marks of holiness which the Church is called to show are those which can be seen in the

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life of Jesus, the holy one of God. So holiness is not an otherworldly characteristic; it is a Christlike one, deriving from the God whose very being was “imprinted” on Jesus (Hebrews 1:3). In the Methodist tradition, Christian holiness has been defined as “perfect love” and such an understanding makes clear both the inner dynamic and the outward expression of the Church’s life. Like unity, it is both gift and aspiration.

16. Methodists understand that salvation is the ongoing experience of God’s loving, transforming presence; enabling us to grow and transform and become the people God intended, enabling us to grow in our ability to live as Jesus did, deepening our knowledge and love of God, and manifesting that love through the ways in which we live our lives. The sanctifying nature of divine grace working in God’s people leads the Church to become a community that transforms wider society. Christians participate in God’s work in the world and service is a fundamental part of our discipleship. Part of the Church’s mission is its commitment to social justice.
17. A Christian way of living in anticipation of the fullness of the kingdom of God remains difficult to sustain both for individuals and for the Church as an institution. We reflect the divine image in a broken way. This has been true from the beginning. The New Testament does not know of a perfect Christian community, and human sinfulness has not diminished with the passage of time. The life of the Church is eroded by it; its symptoms and results include fractured relationships, (both personal and communal), unwitting exclusivisms, and discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, age, wealth or sexuality. The Church in the past has excluded many believing it was acting fairly and justly by adhering to its well established boundaries. The Church is challenged to acknowledge the ways in which it fails to live up to its calling, and to continue to prayerfully reflect on the boundaries it establishes. Furthermore, we must always be alert to any inadvertent exclusion and prejudice through our ignorance rather than a conscious desire not to be a place of sanctuary, refuge, safety and love for the marginalised. The Church is reminded of its own need for forgiveness and grace, and turns to God to seek new life in Jesus Christ.
18. The Church must always remember it is God’s church and as such it must remain faithful to God’s calling and mission. The boundaries which exist, should only serve to preserve the God-given identity of the Church. In this way only, the Church’s inclusivity cannot be described as limitless, nor should it be. The Church continues to seek the gift of the Holy Spirit in discerning appropriate boundaries which are faithful to its divine calling. This presents many challenges and we need to deepen our learning and reflect on the decisions we make regarding our boundaries, and recognise when we have made mistakes. These decisions should remain contingent and provisional.
19. The Church’s commitment to matters of equality, diversity and inclusion is founded on the premise that God’s love is universal, and that it is God’s will that all should

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be drawn into deeper experience and understanding of the life and purpose of God. As a manifestation of the Body of Christ, the Church is called to worship God and to witness to God's saving grace to humankind. As such, it is called to exist not only for its own sake, but for the life of the world.

Agreed by the Faith and Order Committee and reported to the Methodist Council,
October 2015, Revised February 2021

Appendix 6

List of Indicators

The Inclusive Church Implementation Group has developed this list of indicators to help us see what the Church will look like in the future. While not exhaustive, this list of indicators provides a useful way of measuring our progress towards the vision of this strategy.

1. Shared mission, vision and purpose: communicated in a variety of methods and understood in all spheres of the Church's life.

2. Equal welcome for all: taking into account the appropriateness of worship activities, with a systematic approach to welcoming all people and safeguarding all.

This includes ensuring accessibility for all people with protected characteristics, but also going beyond the specifications of legislation to reflect God's love for each and every one.

3. Participation: developing our structures and processes so that they allow the full participation of all members.

4. Representation: the people who lead, work for, and represent, across the Church reflects the diversity of our membership, as a whole.

5. Risk and Safety: taking the necessary steps to protect members of the public and of the Church. It is acknowledged that this needs to involve different things for different people in different contexts, and to be supported by relevant policies, guidelines and appropriate training.

All of this is said, however, within the constraints of all other Methodist safeguarding policy and practice.

6. Facts and Figures: Diversity data is published to demonstrate transparency and there is a commitment to identify and address gaps in the staff teams, leadership and membership of the church.

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7. Policies and Procedures: developed after consultation with the EDI Support processes, such policies and procedures are made readily available in accessible formats.

Any policy breach is dealt with immediately and professionally.

8. Organisational Structure and Governance Processes: diverse members are consulted on what this means for them. There is a sense of order which does not limit innovation and growth. Input from the church community and staff is equally valued and used to promote and implement positive change.

9. Training and development: members, staff and leadership are provided with opportunities for learning which raises awareness and facilitates further understanding. Partnerships are fostered and opportunities created so that existing talent can grow and develop, including individual plans to support differing abilities in their vocations.

Accelerated and intensive support is offered to increase the development of people who might otherwise not be able to respond to their calling.

10. Unmet expectations: failure to act in accordance with the agreed principles of this strategy is addressed through conflict resolution along with robust disciplinary procedures which include clear lines of escalation (and sanctions if necessary).

All are offered the opportunity for reflection and repentance, with support for change of attitude and behaviour, and for reconciliation, before disciplinary action is taken. Support for the victimised and protection from further harm in these situations are always be paramount.

11. Organisational Leadership: Leaders, in all spheres of church life, model behaviours that embrace diversity, inclusion, and justice. Leaders take ownership to develop their understandings of disadvantage, including the protected characteristics, as well as the advantages or disadvantages they personally face, in order to remove barriers and promote just behaviours for all. Leaders advocate and demonstrate their commitment to the paradigm shift demanded in this report.

Leaders take responsibility for fostering a culture of Justice, Dignity, and Solidarity within their own context.

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12. Fair Recruitment: in order to enable the enrichment of the church by visibly diverse leadership there are targeted appointment programmes which seek to remove any conscious and unconscious bias from the selection processes.

All appointments are made by open advert recruitment processes.

Objective ways to ensure transparency and testing are developed and in all appointment processes there is comparison of the protected characteristics and qualifications of applicants with the person appointed.

Decisions of people who recruit are regularly reviewed.

Recruitment and appointment processes are transparent and interview panels are diverse.