

61. Memorials to the Conference

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Notes for the guidance of members of the Conference

1. Introduction to memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They suggest that the Conference takes action or makes a statement on an issue. The memorials received since the last Conference are listed in this report. These memorials may help members of the Conference to judge the main concerns currently felt in the Connexion, and the strength of opinion they represent.

Each year the Methodist Council is required to appoint a Memorials Committee to aid the Conference in replying to each memorial. The replies to these memorials have been drafted by members of the Connexional Team and officers of other relevant bodies. They have been scrutinised by the Memorials Committee and amended where the committee felt it was appropriate.

The committee recommends to the Conference the replies printed in the Agenda under each memorial. The Conference binds itself either to agree each reply, to amend it, or to agree an alternative reply (see Standing Order 133(4), printed in the Rules of Procedure on page 14 of the Agenda).

In some of its responses, the committee makes no comment on the substance of a memorial, but indicates that the reply of the Conference is given in other resolutions of the Conference. This kind of response does not mean that the committee has not taken seriously the points made in the memorial. It means that another report deals with the issue more fully. Debate on that report gives the Conference an opportunity to discuss the issues raised by the memorial.

2. Consideration of the memorials by the Conference

Any member of the Conference has the right to move an amendment to the reply recommended by the committee, or to propose that it is substituted by a different reply. Amendments to replies should be submitted in the form of a notice of motion, the deadlines for which can be found in the First Report of the Conference Business Committee on page 26 of the Agenda. However, members are urged to give notice of their intention to move an amendment as early as possible and not to wait until the deadline.

If the Conference rejects a reply, an acceptable alternative must, then or later, be put to and agreed by the Conference. In addition, any two members of the Conference may, by notice of motion submitted on the first day of the relevant session, propose that, instead of dealing with the committee's recommended replies in the ordinary course of business, the Conference shall debate a resolution based on one or more of the memorials.

This year, the Memorials Committee has recommended to the Conference Business Committee that the replies to any memorials which relate to other items of business in the Agenda be taken at the same time as that business, and that the remaining replies should be placed in the *en bloc* business of the Conference, unless the Business Committee feels that they should be debated. Any recommended reply to a memorial which is the subject of an amending notice of motion will automatically be removed from *en bloc* business (see Standing Order 134A(1)(c), Agenda page 15).

Members of the Conference with questions on any matter affecting memorials and the procedures described above should consult the Memorials Secretary, Catherine Dixon. For example, if any member wishes to change the recommended reply of the committee, the Memorials Secretary would be happy to advise on how and when to propose either an amendment or the substitution of a different reply.

The Memorials Secretary will notify each Synod and Circuit of the reply the Conference has made to its memorial.

M1 Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) Levy

The South East District Synod (Present: 123; Voting: 108 for, 4 against) expresses its deep concern that since the suspension of the work of the Connexional Grants Committee (CGC) and giving from the Connexional Priority Fund, Fund for Property, and Mission in Britain Fund in the light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, churches have continued to be required to contribute the full CPF Levy but have not had the benefit of applying for property grants. It seems unfair to ask for a levy that is not accessible to churches for key mission including property projects while mission projects are still continuing. By not deducting the property and missional elements of the levy for the time being, churches can use those funds towards the Church's mission in their locality and context. The South East District therefore asks that the Methodist Council bring and enact revised procedures to remedy this apparent injustice.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South East District Synod for this memorial and thereby giving the opportunity to highlight how the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) levy is used.

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The CPF levy has continued to be used for the furtherance of the mission of the Church during the current pandemic. 27.5% of the levy goes straight back out to Districts through the District Advance Funds (DAFs). The purposes of the DAFs as outlined in SO 963 include amongst other things, grants “for property projects”. 45% of the levy goes straight to the Pension Reserve Fund (PRF). Having established a PRF and built up its value over recent years, this has to date avoided the need for further increases in pension contributions from Circuits, leaving more money locally to be allocated by trustees in line with their mission plans. 21.5% of the levy is retained in the CPF to support connexional priorities. At the current time, the majority of the fund will be focused on funding the *God for All* strategy that was approved by the Conference in 2020. The balance of 6% of the levy contributes to the Methodist Church Fund and in turn reduces the upward pressure on the District Assessments.

It is unfortunate that the Methodist Council had to act decisively in the face of the pandemic and put the grant-making process on hold. This was due to the immediate loss of income that was experienced and the uncertainty about when income levels would recover. The Conference recognises that some projects were adversely impacted as a result of this necessary decision.

However, despite the suddenness of the change in grant funding caused by the pandemic, property grants were already forecast to decline and other changes to the grant-making process were under consideration, as can be seen in the proposals elsewhere in the Conference Agenda. In line with the Connexional Financial Strategy to use funds and spend down to reserve levels, grant giving from the Fund for Property (FFP) had exceeded income for some years. As the fund is now at reserve level, grants can only be funded from investment returns and donations. Given the much reduced resources available and the need for fairness, grants are now only given for ‘feasibility funding’ up to a limit of £10k per project.

As the CPF continues to fund the missional work of the church and property grants can still be accessed by churches to the extent that funds are available in the FFP, the Conference declines the memorial.

M2 Stipends of Presbyters and Deacons

The Bridlington (29/10) Circuit (Present: 11 Voting: unanimous) requests the Connexion to pay the stipend of all Presbyters and Deacons for the one year 2021/2022 thus enabling Circuits and churches to restore congregations and renew financial resources following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bridlington Circuit for its memorial and drawing attention to the financial pressures being encountered across the Connexion.

At its meeting in January, the Methodist Council reviewed the proposal for a 'stipend holiday' for Circuits during 2021/22. The approximate cost of stipends in 2021/22 will be £44m. The Council reviewed the total value of the balance sheet reported in the accounts which is as follows:

- £79m Bodies formally under the 'control' of the Methodist Council but whose assets are not readily realisable. For example, this value includes Cliff College, Southlands, North Bank Estate.
- £63m Connexional properties (Methodist Church House; connexional manses; The Wesley) that could not be sold in time and would not be wise to sell in this way.
- £20m Endowment funds where the capital cannot be spent, and certainly could not be used for ministerial stipends. £63m Restricted funds where the purposes of the funds do not provide for the payment of ministerial stipends, for example World Mission Fund; ministerial benevolent funds; training; etc.
- £35m Pension Reserve Fund specifically required to fund the current deficit in the ministers' and lay employees' pension schemes.
- £16m Funds to cover the repayment of some property levies and next year's District Advance Funds and the remaining balance to be used for the renewal of Our Calling, as already approved by the Conference.
- £2m Unrestricted monies meeting the day to day peaks and troughs in income and expenditure.

The Connexional Funds therefore do not have £44m of reserves available to cover these costs so it is simply not possible to meet this request. In contrast churches, Circuits and Districts have considerable reserves. We can only estimate these as there is no system of connexional data collection of the accounts. However, we know:

- They hold deposits in the Central Finance Board of approximately £250m.
- We estimate there is a further £50m held in commercial bank accounts.
- Based on limited data provided last year, approximately 25% of these balances are probably subject to restrictions.

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- That leaves approximately £225m in church, circuit and district general reserves available that could fund all stipends for the next five years without any call on Connexional Funds.

Therefore, although there are sizeable reserves held across the Connexion, there are not sizeable reserves held in Connexional Funds. Consequently, the Conference declines the Memorial.

M3 Finances and the pandemic

The Central Norfolk (14/15) Circuit Meeting (Present: 41; Voting: 36 for, 0 against) draws the Conference's attention to the situation common to many Circuits around the country where, as a consequence of the pandemic, there is exceptional pressure on Circuits to manage their finances. Churches and Circuits are struggling to fulfil their commitments and to know best how to make up financial shortfalls. Exceptional times require exceptional action and we ask the Conference to consider whether there are any sources of funding, or any connexional resources, which can be made available to Circuits to support and encourage them, and to assist in strategic financial planning.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Central Norfolk Circuit for drawing attention to the financial pressures being experienced across the Connexion and in part gives the same reply as for M2.

In relation to providing practical support for Circuits, the Conference draws attention to the information published on the Methodist Church website Coronavirus Guidance for Property (methodist.org.uk) in the section "Covid-19 Funding (10 August*)". Whilst financial plans need to be rooted in the local mission plan, circuit treasurers in need of support should contact their district treasurer who may be able to offer advice or share best practice from elsewhere in the District. The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M4 Local Preachers

The Manchester (19/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 41; Voting: 40 for, 0 against) notes that Standing Order 563(2)(vi) creates a duty on local preachers "if unable to fulfil an appointment, to arrange for a suitable substitute, informing the Superintendent and a church steward of the Local Church concerned" and that this is often reproduced on the plan as a reminder to local preachers.

The Meeting notes that the SO does not take into account the circumstances that may

lead a preacher to be unable to take an appointment such as illness or bereavement, and that as it stands this SO can place additional stress on preachers, especially when dealing with mental health issues.

In practice, the Circuit, through the Superintendent Minister often takes responsibility for finding a substitute or making other arrangements when a preacher faces these circumstances.

However, the Circuit Meeting believes that our Standing Orders should model best practice and be pastorally sensitive. It therefore calls upon the Conference to amend the SO to achieve this and suggests the following wording:

(vi) if unable to fulfil an appointment, except through illness or bereavement, to arrange for a suitable substitute, informing the Superintendent and a church steward of the Local Church concerned.

If unable to fulfil an appointment through illness or bereavement, to inform the Superintendent who will make alternative arrangements.

The Circuit Meeting also invites the Conference to encourage Circuits wherever possible to have contingency plans in place for such occasions to assist the Superintendent and to encourage preachers to rise to the challenge of standing in in emergencies whenever possible.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Manchester Circuit for its memorial and agrees that pastoral best practice should be reflected in our Standing Orders.

The Conference recognises that the existing wording of 563(2)(vi) may be seen to place an additional burden on local preachers at a difficult time. It also recognises that in practice, the Superintendent Minister has to make alternative arrangements.

The Conference celebrates that many Circuits already have in place contingency plans for such occasions and expresses its appreciation to local preachers and ministers who rise to the challenge of standing in in emergencies.

However, the Conference also recognises that illness and bereavement may not be the only legitimate causes of a crisis preventing a local preacher from fulfilling their obligations.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial but directs the Ministries Committee to

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review Standing Order 563(2)(vi) and report to the 2022 Conference.

M5 Local Preachers Training Syllabus

The Sherwood Forest (22/23) Circuit Meeting (Present: 33; Voting: Unanimous) and its Local Preachers' Meeting thanks all of those who have worked on the new local preacher training syllabus and material. We recognise the excellent quality of the online resources; however, we feel that not sufficient account has been taken of different learning styles among those who are in training.

We feel that the insistence on an online training programme, and one that demands a high standard of academic ability, works against the church's desire to embrace equality and diversity. It may well also put off younger people who have so many other demands on their time.

While not wishing in any way to devalue the importance of good, sound training for prospective preachers, we urge the Local Preachers' Office either to amend the course or to provide additional pathways so that our training is

1. Available to non-academic students who have a call to preach.
2. Available to those who are not computer literate and/or for whom English is not their first language.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sherwood Circuit for their memorial and their astute observations on the current pathway for local preacher training.

In trying to equip all those whom God is calling to preach the Conference takes very seriously the concerns regarding learning styles and academic standards, and affirm our strong commitment to making theological education available to those of all backgrounds, embracing our common desire to embrace equality and diversity.

The Local Preachers Board of Studies has recently embarked on a comprehensive review of the entire content of the *Worship: Leading & Preaching* course. In the review, we will be seeking to ensure that the range of resources offered are suitable for people of all educational and cultural backgrounds.

The Conference recognises that some sections of the course currently contain a high proportion of academically-demanding reading material, whereas other sections make more extensive use of more accessible audio, pictorial or video material. As part of the review we will seek to achieve a better balance of opportunity across the course, aiming

to provide stimulating content and challenge for all.

Worship: Leading & Preaching was created as a blended learning programme (including text, pictures, sound and video). The intention remains to provide for people with different learning styles and preferences. Whilst provision of a paper-based course would be welcome to some, it would also make access harder for many including those whose primary means of communication is now their phone or tablet.

The provision of training resources for those whose heart language is not English is a particular challenge. The ministries team welcomes suggestions for collaboration in development of context-specific materials, whilst recognising the resources that would be required to develop these.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial but directs the Local Preachers' Board of Studies to be aware of the memorial whilst conducting the current review of the course contents.

M6 The impact of COVID-19 on Training of Local Preachers and Worship Leaders

The York (29/33) Circuit Council (Present: 33; Voting: 32 for, 0 against) was concerned to hear from the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Meeting that several of their Preachers On Trial and Worship Leaders in Training had been adversely affected by the impact of COVID-19. The effect of home schooling, changed work patterns and business crises, combined with churches in lockdown has meant that both study and gaining practical experience have been curtailed. In the light of this, we ask the Conference to direct that Districts should consider the "very exceptional circumstances" under which extensions are granted under SO 564B(3) to include the effects of COVID-19 on the life circumstances of Preachers on Trial.

Reply

The Conference thanks the York Circuit for its memorial. It recognises that COVID-19 has been a very exceptional circumstance and requests the Officer for Worship and Local Preachers to draft guidelines to District Policy Committees recommending extensions to on trial periods be offered of up to two years.

The Conference accepts the memorial.

M7 Supernumerary Ministers

The Presbyteral Synod of the Southampton District (Present: 79; Voting: 75 for, 0 against)

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gives thanks for the work carried out by the District 'Supernumeraries Gifts and Needs Group', during the five years of its existence, in enabling such ministers to continue to offer support to the Circuits and District whilst also being held in a supportive community, and

endorses the concept of a letter of agreement between a supernumerary and a Circuit that appears on the connexional website as an example of good practice in the relationship between a supernumerary and the Circuit in which the supernumerary is stationed, and

requests the Conference to take the following actions:

- To affirm the significance of a letter of understanding between a supernumerary and their Circuit,
- To reaffirm the status of a supernumerary as a Minister within their Circuit,
- To remind connexional bodies of the contribution that a supernumerary can make to the life of the Church and thus encourage consideration of supernumeraries when making appointments,
- To ask Districts to develop suitable methods of supporting supernumeraries,
- And to ask Districts to encourage Circuits to consider how they can support the supernumeraries stationed in their Circuits.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Presbyteral Session of the Southampton Synod for its memorial and gives thanks, with them, for the work of the District's Supernumeraries Gifts and Needs Group. In particular the Conference is grateful for the collaboration between the group and the Ministries Team in drafting the materials on being supernumerary which are on the Methodist Church website.

The Conference is pleased to commend, where appropriate to the context and the individuals, the concept of a letter of understanding between a supernumerary and a Circuit as an example of good practice in the relationship between a supernumerary and the Circuit in which the supernumerary is stationed.

The Conference accepts the memorial and directs the Ministries Committee to oversee the actions contained within it.

M8 Cry for Hope

The South Worcestershire (5/16) Circuit Meeting (Present: 53; Voting: 48 for, 0 against), being deeply concerned about the situation faced by the Palestinian people, draws the

attention of Conference to the “Cry for Hope*” published in July 2020 by leaders of the Christian community in Palestine. The Circuit Meeting is deeply disturbed by the plight of Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank, who have now lived under Occupation for over fifty years, for whom the last four years have been especially difficult and who have been disastrously affected economically by the pandemic, including through the demise of tourism. We have been further dismayed at Israel’s self-promotion in being foremost in rolling out the COVID vaccine, while at the same time severely limiting its access for Palestinians. We call upon the Conference to consider ways that British Methodism can strengthen its support for ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians through promoting equal human rights for all who live between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. To this end we ask the Conference:

- To commend the “Cry for Hope’ to the Methodist people, encouraging them to endorse it and act on its recommendations, including through divestment and sanctions in relation to companies supporting the Occupation in any way;
- To strongly urge the Central Finance Board to act immediately on the decisions of the Methodist Council in January 2021 to update their investment policy, and divest from any company profiting from the Occupation;
- To call upon the British Government to end support for military contracts with Israel whilst that country remains in violation of international law.

The text of “Cry for Hope” can be found at www.cryforhope.org

Reply

The Conference thanks the South Worcestershire Circuit for drawing attention to the appeal from Kairos Palestine, ‘Cry for Hope’.

The Conference remains aware of the desperate situation in the West Bank and Gaza brought about through occupation and blockade and also of the increased reporting of anti-Semitism in the UK context. The Conference offers prayers for all people in the region affected in a variety of ways by the ongoing conflict and strained relations as a consequence of ongoing injustices and distrust. The Conference calls to mind its previous resolutions appealing for solidarity with all and for constructive dialogue that is alert to presence of racism and anti-Semitism in the UK and beyond. The Conference commends the EDI toolkit particularly module 6, to support and enrich study and action. The Conference continues to commend for study the list of resources on the Methodist Church website (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/>)

As described in the report ‘Justice for Palestine and Israel’ received by the Conference in 2009, the physical barriers in the West Bank, restrictions on movement, longstanding

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practice of arbitrary arrest through administrative detention, house demolitions and Palestinian's lack of recourse to justice, impose not only severe physical hardships and injury, but also a 'deep humiliation' that has psychological impact on the Palestinian people.

The Methodist Council report MC/21/18 noted that recent developments including the passing of the Nation State law in 2018 and statements by the Prime Minister of Israel and other cabinet members suggest that the Government of Israel no longer has an intention to permit a viable Palestinian State in the region. The continued expansion of illegal settlements increases the population of Jewish Israelis in the West Bank, while denying building permits to Palestinians, giving an impression of the permanence of the occupation.

The report 'Cry for Hope' argues that "we have come to the end of the illusion that Israel and the world powers intend to honour and defend the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, self-determination, and the fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees". It argues that, in the light of the denial of democratic rights of Palestinians in the West Bank, the continued oppressive measures and the moves towards outright annexation of around one third of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley. The Conference notes that the report argues it is time for the international community to recognise Israel as an apartheid State in the terms of international law.

The Conference has long maintained a position first outlined by the 2001 Conference, "recognising that peace and security can only be achieved when international judgements are respected and justice is done", and that "a return to the borders of 1967 and a status for Jerusalem as a place for two nations and three faiths, with parity of esteem, is the real basis upon which trust could be built up among the different communities. The desire for a lasting peace can only be based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in the area".

The Conference has stated on numerous occasions that the expansion of settlement infrastructure prevents the attainment of a two-state solution and undermines the basis on which trust between communities can be built. The unilateral de facto annexation of a large part of the West Bank presents a very different situation to that which guided the Conference in the past. The appeal of the supporters of Kairos Palestine offers an opportunity to consider how this long established position of the Conference with its reference to "parity of esteem" informs the current situation.

The Conference commends for careful and prayerful study by the Methodist people the document "Cry for Hope". The Conference invites readers to use discernment with respect to the various aspects of the call. The Conference calls upon the British

Government to end support for military contracts with Israel whilst that country remains in violation of international law. The Conference acknowledges that the complexity of this situation is not the lived experience of the majority of most British Methodists, and welcomes the opportunity to learn from sisters and brothers across the region and across faiths.

Noting that the “Cry for Hope” does not use the term ‘sanction’ specifically in relation to companies with operations in Israel or the occupied territories, the Conference supports the commitment made by the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment and the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church to dedicate time and resources to review the Investment Policy in relation to Israel and Palestine. The Council has considered Memorials M7-M9 (2020) and commends a reply to the Conference, in Agenda item 3, Section B. This reply requires transparent due diligence on the part of companies to ensure that their operations do not provide financial or other assistance to the occupation and it seeks exclusion from investment of companies operating in settlement areas in the occupied Palestinian territories.

M9 A Cry For Hope – Palestine

The Sheffield (25/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 72; Voting: 63 for, 1 against) notes with concern the deteriorating situation of the Christian community in Palestine expressed in the recently published document “Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action”.

We call upon the Conference to commend this document to the Methodist people for study and action.

- The text of Cry for Hope” can be found at www.cryforhope.org

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sheffield Circuit for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M8.

M10 Israel/ Palestine – Cry for Hope

The Birmingham Synod (Present: 141; Voting: 121 for, 7 against), being deeply concerned about the situation faced by the Palestinian people, draws the attention of Conference to the “Cry for Hope*” published in July 2020 by leaders of the Christian community in Palestine. The Synod is deeply disturbed by the plight of Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank, who have now lived under Occupation for over fifty years, for whom the last four years have been especially difficult and who have been disastrously affected economically by the pandemic, including through the demise of tourism. We have been

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further dismayed at Israel's self-promotion in being foremost in rolling out the COVID vaccine, while at the same time severely limiting its access for Palestinians. We call upon the Conference to consider ways that British Methodism can strengthen its support for ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians through promoting equal human rights for all who live between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. To this end we ask the Conference:

- To commend the "Cry for Hope" to the Methodist people, encouraging them to endorse it and act on its recommendations, including through divestment and sanctions in relation to companies supporting the Occupation in any way;
- To strongly urge the Central Finance Board to act immediately on the decisions of the Methodist Council in January 2021 to update their investment policy, and divest from any company profiting from the Occupation particularly Caterpillar and Siemens;
- To call upon the British Government to end their ongoing support for the government of Israel in the fields of security and the military whilst that country remains in violation of international law.

* The text of "Cry for Hope" can be found at www.cryforhope.org

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Birmingham Synod for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M8.

M11 Cry for Hope

The Darlington Synod (Present: 82; Voting: 80 for, 2 against) notes with concern the deteriorating situation of the indigenous Christian community in Palestine expressed in the recently published "Cry for Hope*." The Synod calls upon the Conference to commend "Cry for Hope" to our members encouraging them to read it and consider taking the actions it commends. *"Cry for Hope" was written by Christian Leaders in Bethlehem and published in July 2020. The full text of "Cry for Hope" can be found at www.cryforhope.org*

Reply

The Conference thanks the Darlington Synod for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M8.

M12 Fossil Fuels

The Bradford North (27/32) Circuit (Present: 31; Voting: Unanimous) rejoices in the

partial divestment by the Methodist Church Central Finance Board from fossil fuels by selling its holdings in BP and Total, and requests that all other holdings in fossil fuel companies be sold by 2025.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bradford North Circuit for its memorial. Many across the Methodist Church will share the Circuit's concern with respect to fossil fuels and investment, in this crucial year for global climate action.

Following further analysis and engagement with companies carried out by the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) since the 2020 Conference, the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) has advised exclusion of five companies leading to disinvestment by the CFB from all companies in the oil and gas sector. The report of JACEI [Agenda Item 32] 'Climate Change and Fossil Fuels' provides a full response and the reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference.

M13 Fossil Fuels

The Bradford South (27/33) Circuit Meeting (Present: 31; Voting: 27 for, 2 against), seeking to be good stewards of God's creation and a good neighbour to those in need, welcomes the decision of the Methodist Council to recommend disinvestment of all Methodist funds from the fossil fuel companies we had previously invested in.

The Circuit Meeting further calls upon the Conference to ask the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment to ensure that no new investments are made by the Church in any fossil fuel companies.

We further encourage the Central Finance Board to invest in clean and sustainable developments as a way of safeguarding God's creation.

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Bradford South Circuit for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M12.

M14 Farming Industry

The Shropshire and Marches (28/3) Circuit Meeting (Present: 58; Voting: 56 for, 0 against), of which the Borderlands Rural chaplaincy is part, wishes the Conference to consider the role of our farmers in feeding the nation and preserving the environment.

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During the COVID-19 pandemic farming and food production was recognised in ways it has not been for some time. It is important that we support our farmers and correct misinformation especially in terms of climate change. Farming is recognised as an activity that contributes to climate change through its greenhouse gas emissions, especially of methane and nitrous oxides. However, what also needs to be recognised is that farmers are an essential part of helping all of us achieve net zero, through the ability of managing soil to sequester carbon and through other land use changes such as rewilding and tree planting. The farming industry deserves our support to have adopted a net zero target by 2040, ten years ahead of government.

The recent Agriculture Act has been designed with a heavy emphasis on the environment which is necessary to combat rising global temperatures, it says very little about the need to produce our own food. We currently import approximately 40% of all our food, with no assurance of it being produced to the same standards of welfare and sustainability. While the act is being interpreted and implemented we must continue to put pressure on government to maintain our food security, and ensure that all imported food is produced to a standard of welfare equal to ours, and in an environmentally sustainable way.

The Methodist Church should play a leading role in ensuring that we have an adequate supply of sustainably produced food, that we support efforts to reverse global warming, and maintain our rich natural heritage in the countryside. In order to do this we are asking the Conference to:

- Encourage the support of farmers, where financially and practically possible, by buying locally produced and fairly traded food, and by prayer.
- Encourage the use of properly researched relevant agricultural data which represents UK statistics.
- Lobby government on issues of food security and the standards of imported food.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Shropshire and Marches Circuit for its memorial, and expresses its appreciation to the Borderlands Rural Chaplaincy for its work offering pastoral support to farmers, farming families and agricultural communities.

The memorial highlights the often difficult environment in which farmers operate, and the Conference acknowledges British farmers' vital role in producing 60% of the UK's food alongside managing the land. The memorial also draws attention to the complexity of many of the issues involved, and the role that farming has to play.

Climate change is an urgent challenge for us all, and is one with which many involved in land management and food production are wrestling. The National Farmers' Union,

the largest organisation in England and Wales representing farmers and growers, has, for example, set out a target of reaching net zero by 2040 and this is to be warmly welcomed. The Conference recognises that this represents a huge commitment and that the plan requires improvements in carbon efficiency during food production as well as increasing carbon sinks by improving soils and increasing hedgerows and woodland soils. As the memorial notes, these actions are to be greatly commended.

It should also be noted that the net zero plan as set out by the National Farmers Union is problematic. The majority of the move to net zero is not achieved by reducing emissions, improving farming practices or increasing carbon sinks but instead by proposing to set up a separate carbon capture industry to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it using technology that is not currently and may never be available at scale.¹

The memorial also encourages people to buy locally produced goods. This a good way of supporting local economies and building community and should be welcomed as such. Its value in countering climate change is however less clear. The vast majority of the carbon cost of food is in its production rather than the transport. Locally sourced meat can have a lower carbon footprint than industrially produced and imported meat. Yet counterintuitively it may still be better for the climate to eat food with low embodied carbon that has travelled a long way, than a product that required a high amount of carbon to grow that is sourced locally. This is one example of the complexity of the issues around farming, food and climate and underscores the need to produce food in as carbon efficient a way as possible.

Farming is part of a complex web of competing concerns, which must be held in balance. The Conference has previously expressed the desire to ensure that people in poverty can eat well, a commitment to high environmental and welfare standards, the call for global climate justice and an aspiration to support developing countries through fair trade. In public policy sometimes these commitments need to be held in balance. It is necessary to hold in tension the competing interests around environment, welfare and price and to look for win-win solutions. Grains and produce grown in developing countries may support struggling economies but in some instances could be responsible for deforestation. An increase in plant-based diets may increase pressure on cattle farmers while reducing overall climate impact. The balance between competing concerns for sustainability, welfare, price and fair trade is never going to be an easy one. The Conference recognises the important role that farming has to play in striking that balance.

1 Achieving NET ZERO: Farming's 2040 goal, the National Farmers Union, <https://www.nfuonline.com/nfu-online/business/regulation/achieving-net-zero-farmings-2040-goal/> Page 6 Accessed 15 April 2021

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Therefore in response to the requests made in the memorial:

- The Conference welcomes the opportunity to affirm its prayerful support for farmers, and for farming chaplaincies. Whilst encouraging people to buy from local farmers, it also reminds them of the complexities involved in balancing support for local economies, buying low carbon food, and buying affordable food.
- The Conference affirms the need to consider accurate statistics, and recognises that there will be a wide range of data sets created by different bodies to highlight various aspects of these issues, and it is important that these are all taken into account.
- The Conference recognises the complexity of balancing its commitment to household food security, climate change, animal welfare and international fair trade, and subject to balancing those concerns, supports making the case for change to government and parliament when relevant opportunities arise.

M15 Single Use Plastic

The Nottingham and Derby District Synod (Present: 125; Voting: 112 for, 4 against), is deeply concerned about the environmental impact of single-use plastics, and believing that the Methodist Church should take a lead in ending their use, requests the Conference:

to direct that the use of single-use plastics in connection with all connexional, district, circuit or local church activities be phased out, with the target that by 2024 their use shall be exceptional;

to direct that an entry be added to the annual property return for churches requiring churches to indicate their use of one-off plastics, the results to be included in summaries of returns;

to request that the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) produces resources aimed at giving the Connexion, Districts, circuits, churches and individual Methodists guidance and encouragement on reducing their use of single-use plastics, identifying alternatives.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Nottingham and Derby Synod for its memorial and the concern for creation that it expresses.

The Conference has previously expressed concern over the unnecessary use of plastic (Memorial M27 to the 2018 Conference) and invited Circuits, Districts, the Methodist Council and the Methodist people individually to act on this issue. The Conference does not have the authority to direct Districts, Circuits or Local Churches in the way requested

in the memorial. However, the Conference does take this opportunity wholeheartedly to encourage Methodist people across the Connexion to reduce or cease their use of single-use plastics.

The Conference accepts that regular reporting on the use of single-use plastic from churches would help assess the need for future action on this issue and would provide an opportunity for reflection for churches on their practice. Therefore, the Conference requests the Property Support Team to incorporate an appropriate entry into the annual property return for churches from September 2021 requiring churches to indicate their use of single-use plastics, and ensure the results are included in summaries of returns.

The Conference notes the excellent resources on this issue available from JPIT's Living Lent campaign (<https://livinglent.org/what-could-i-do/single-use-plastics>), the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics on Investment (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11750/jacei-leaflet-2019.pdf>), the BBC (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/plasticwatch>) and Plastic Free July (<https://www.plasticfreejuly.org>) and commends these to the Connexion for prayerful study and action. As there are already resources giving guidance and encouragement on reducing use of single-use plastics and identifying alternatives, the Conference declines to direct that further resources be produced on this issue.

M16 COVID-19 Vaccination Resources

The East Anglia District Synod (Present: 135; Voting: 134 for, 1 against) is disturbed by the lack of equitable access globally to COVID-19 vaccination resources and draws the Conference's attention to the COVAX programme, established by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations, part of the World Health Organisation, as a global co-operative to ensure that the COVID vaccine is made available to lower income countries. Success in the work of COVAX is vital to the achievement of the United Nation's sustainable development goals.

In light of the enormity of the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Synod is extremely encouraged that the global scientific community has been able to accelerate the development of several vaccines which collectively are proving to be successful in reducing the risk of catching the disease and further reducing the severity of illness in those who still become infected. However, we believe that concurrently we are witnessing the worst effects of geopolitics: richer nations are responding to growing nationalism and protectionism as they seek to abuse their buying power to dominate access to this vital resource; aggressive nations are wielding their power and influence over others by making vaccine supply to poorer nations a lever in their drive for greater global power domination.

Believing this to be an issue pivotal to *Our Calling* and desire for global justice, we ask the Conference to make a statement of support for the COVAX programme and global

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vaccination, and to adopt this as a major campaign of fund-raising and global political influence, alongside an education awareness programme for church members. We further encourage the Conference to invite All We Can to respond to such a statement by considering the inclusion of an integrated programme of education, political influence and fund raising in their work.

Reply

The Conference thanks the East Anglia Synod for raising the important issue of the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. It is clear that those in low-income nations are set to wait much longer for vaccination than those in high-income nations, leaving the global poor at higher risk of disease and death from COVID-19. By April 2021, one in four people on average in high-income countries had received a vaccine compared with less than 1 in 500 in low-income countries.

COVAX is co-led by CEPI², Gavi³ and the World Health Organisation, with UNICEF as the key delivery partner. It aims to provide a more equitable distribution of vaccines worldwide. The initial design was for rich and poor nations to purchase COVID vaccines through the scheme, with the poorest receiving free or subsidised doses.

The availability of vaccine to low-income nations, however, is now being systematically delayed by the limited, though large, rate of vaccine production and the fact that higher-income nations, including the UK, preferred instead to negotiate directly with manufacturers, securing preferential arrangements to supply doses for their populations first.

COVAX also aims to increase supply by sharing knowledge and technology to spread the means of producing vaccine more widely. In addition, it has set up the facility to purchase two billion doses of vaccine – sufficient to vaccinate health care workers and high-risk populations in 92 low- and middle-income countries that cannot afford to fully fund vaccine purchases. 5% of these doses will be reserved for humanitarian organisations to vaccinate populations, such as refugees, whose nation state is either unwilling or unable to provide vaccinations to them.

The Conference commends in the highest possible terms the work of COVAX and its partners in delivering a more equitable global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and for its founding principle that all should have access to vaccination on the basis of need. It also commends other actions of vaccine solidarity, for example between the African Union and CARICOM in the Caribbean.

2 The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations

3 Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is a public-private global health partnership with the goal of increasing access to immunisation in poor countries

The President and Vice-President of the Conference recently signed a letter as part of the People's Vaccine Alliance, along with over 150 global faith leaders. This called on world leaders "to reject vaccine nationalism and embrace a commitment to global vaccine equity" based on shared knowledge and a vaccine freely available to everyone everywhere.

Alongside partners in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Joint Public Issues Team, the Methodist Church and All We Can have challenged, and continue to challenge, the reduction in the UK's international development budget, noting that the money cut would be sufficient to pay the entire COVAX budget for more than two years. The Conference therefore encourages Methodists to continue to raise the issues outlined in the memorial with their Members of Parliament and asks the Secretary of Conference to convey its concerns to the Prime Minister.

The pandemic has created health, humanitarian, and economic crises in many parts of the world. The Conference recognises that vaccination is one vital component in enabling nations and communities to recover and flourish post-pandemic, but that a wide range of other responses will be required to meet complex humanitarian needs created by the pandemic.

The Methodist Church and All We Can Coronavirus Emergency Appeal, as well as All We Can's ongoing partnership-based long-term development work, are needed now more than ever.

The Methodist Church in Britain continues to pray and share with the response of global partners to COVID-19 and other mission concerns. Through the World Mission Fund, grants of £573,579 in 2019/20 and over £50,000 in 2020/21 at the time of writing have been made to over 40 partners worldwide. This funding supports the work of partner churches and organisations responding to the impact of COVID-19 in their location.

The Conference notes that All We Can is already committed to the integrated programme of education, political influence and fund raising requested by the Memorial, through its 2025 Strategy, which includes the objective of leveraging greater impact in the wider world through collaboration and influence.

The Conference declines the request that the Church and All We Can adopt a major new fundraising campaign in support of COVAX. The Conference instead encourages Methodists to support existing campaigns, including the All We Can and Methodist Church Coronavirus Emergency Appeal. The Conference accepts the other recommendations contained in the memorial.

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M17 Online Holy Communion

The Stoke on Trent South (11/20) Circuit Meeting (Present: 35; Voting: unanimous) has reflected on the past year when our churches have been meeting for worship via a telephone or video conference line, due to COVID-19.

A number of housebound people have enjoyed the opportunity of joining this act of worship. When we are safe to open our church buildings for live services, we will continue using the telephone conference line in the service so as to be inclusive of those not able to attend church due to health and disability reasons.

At present the people attending via the phone line would be excluded from receiving Holy Communion. The 2020 Methodist Conference passed a resolution encouraging “Local Churches to reflect on their response to deprivation in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic”, in the specific context of Holy Communion. We therefore ask the Conference to further address the deprivation of Holy Communion and to give permission for pre-filled communion cups and wafers to be blessed and distributed, to the housebound, so that they can receive during the live worship, in communion with those in the church building.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Stoke on Trent South Circuit for highlighting one of the ways in which people are able to participate in services of worship.

The Methodist Church understands that Holy Communion is a corporate celebration and the practice of blessing bread and wine outside of a service of Holy Communion does not represent a Methodist understanding of this sacrament. The Conference therefore declines permission for pre-filled communion cups and wafers to be blessed and distributed if this were to take place outside of a corporate celebration of Holy Communion.

It is possible, however, for bread and wine to be set apart in a service of public worship after those present have communicated, and for it to be distributed as soon as possible afterwards for a service of extended communion. The ‘bread and wine’ could take the form of pre-filled communion cups and wafers. The service of extended communion could take place online or over the telephone and there is further information in the document *Holy Communion – responding pastorally in the light of Covid-19* (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/faith-and-order/holy-communion-responding-pastorally-in-the-light-of-covid-19/>).

The rest of the response to this memorial is contained in the report *Holy Communion and Online Worship* (Agenda item 39).

M18 Oversight and Trusteeship

The Bangor and Holyhead (2/3) Circuit Meeting (Present: 28; Voting: unanimous), in response to the 2020 Conference Report “Reaffirming Our Calling: Oversight and Trusteeship”, is concerned about the potentially devastating impact of this report upon small rural churches throughout the Connexion.

The outcome of increasing the minimum size of a church (SO 605), especially for churches where the effective federating of congregations is hampered geographically, could inevitably lead to a loss of opportunities for mission, community involvement and church growth alongside a loss of financial independence and inclusion of congregations in decision making and the closure rather than sustainable growth for our rural churches.

We note that the 2017 Conference Report “Statistics for Mission” recorded that within the smallest 2,414 churches (defined as below 33 members) the average weekly attendance was 53% of the total attendance of the Methodist Connexion. (2017 Statistics for Mission Report Table 2 paragraph 2.10).

Rejoicing in the contribution of small rural churches, we therefore ask the Conference to delay consideration of this report until the 2022 Conference, so that it may first commission a small rural churches Review on the potential impact of these proposals and undertake a re-envisioning of the future contribution, status, mission, and governance of small rural churches within the Connexion.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bangor and Holyhead Circuit for the memorial. The Conference notes the Bangor and Holyhead Circuit Meeting’s concerns about the impact of raising the minimum size of a local church in rural areas. The Conference is aware that the Oversight and Trusteeship working group has considered this issue in detail, and refers the Circuit Meeting to the ‘Local Churches’ section in the Oversight and Trusteeship report [Agenda item 30, page 426ff] in the Conference Agenda.

The Conference therefore declines the request to commission a small rural churches review.

M19 All Year Round Conferring of Conference

The Manchester and Stockport District Synod (Present: 111; Voting: 88 for, 14 against) notes the Methodist Council Report on the Review of the Size of the Conference (MC/21/38) and is also aware of the ongoing work in relation to Oversight and Trusteeship which is raising significant questions about the future role and ways of

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working of the Conference. The Synod notes that the Oversight and Trusteeship process may take several years to complete.

In particular, Synod notes paragraph 25 of the Report on the Review of the Size of the Conference which reads as follows:

“The Working Party believes that being a member of the Conference might be recognised as a year-round responsibility, whereby members of the Conference may be called upon to confer about or scrutinise work between Conferences – either as a whole body, or in sub-groups.....Using technology such as Zoom would allow for broad participation. Because there would be no travelling these events could be done at a suitable time to allow as many as possible to attend and spread over several weeks to allow each to have a focus, rather than feel like one was rushing from one subject to another.”

The Synod also notes that in June 2020 an ‘Open Letter’ was sent to the British Methodist Church which has so far been signed by over 700 people. The letter provided an impetus to think about what can be learned from a global pandemic, and how we can shape the Methodist Church in a way which places social justice at its heart as a key priority for growth alongside discipleship and evangelism. Since then, many of those who signed the letter have been involved in an ongoing process of conferring to continue to develop the thinking of the Open Letter and exploring what needs to happen for its vision to be realised. Clear goals are emerging, one of which lies at the heart of this memorial, namely **a greater grass roots participation in decision making and the setting of strategy**. Specific objectives in this regard have been named, one of which is ‘to make Methodist Conference a ‘year-round’ conferring body using Zoom or similar’ and another is ‘embedding conferring into the Connexion at all levels in order to achieve a less hierarchical feel.’

In noting the complementary objectives of the Open Letter and MC/21/38 and not wishing to lose the impetus of the post COVID-19 period as a time of learning and ‘building back better’, the Synod requests that the Conference, independently of any other decisions being made about the future size of the Conference and oversight and trusteeship:

- i. approve the principle of all year round conferring via Zoom or similar (in addition to Conference meeting physically),
- ii. appoint a working group to determine the methodology and polity for such all year round conferring to report to the 2022 Conference, with a view to this new way of working becoming ‘live’ from that point,
- iii. require the working group itself to model and pilot such a methodology by conferring in its decision making with those 2021 Conference members who are willing to participate in the process.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Manchester and Stockport District Synod for its memorial. The work of the review of the size of the Conference is reported to the Conference through the report on 'Oversight and Trusteeship'. The future of the Conference is one strand of the work that needs to be continued on oversight and trusteeship and the issues raised by the working party this year will be drawn into the ongoing work. That work has revealed the importance both of developing effective ways of discerning through conferring and of holding together the different strands of the work. The Conference therefore declines to create another working party and (at this stage) another way of working but directs those responsible for the continuing work on oversight and trusteeship to consider this memorial and to report to the Conference in 2022.

M20 Conversion Therapy

The Birmingham District Synod (Present: 152; Voting: 124 for, 7 against) notes that the current UK Government committed some time ago to banning so-called 'gay conversion therapy' as soon as possible. Whilst there has been a lot of debate about what constitutes this practice, the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' revised and agreed in July 2019 (<https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/mou/>) offers the most significant and widely supported definition. Up to now, 20 health, counselling and psychotherapy organisations have signed up, including the Association of Christian Counsellors.

The Memorandum defines conversion therapy as follows: '*Conversion therapy* is an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis. It goes on to say the practice of conversion therapy, whether in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity, is unethical and potentially harmful.

The Synod notes that in 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England endorsed a statement in similar terms and called on the Archbishops' Council to become a signatory to the statement on behalf of the Church of England. The Synod shares the view that the practice of conversion therapy is unethical and potentially harmful and contrary to the Methodist values set out in the connexional Definition and Guidance on Homophobia.

It therefore requests the Conference:

- (1) to support and adopt the Memorandum of Understanding's definition of conversion therapy as quoted above,

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- (2) to call on all Methodists to refuse to offer, or participate in offering, conversion therapy in any form, and
- (3) to use its good offices to press the UK Government to proceed to ban conversion therapy without further delay.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham Synod for its memorial and shares the concerns raised in regard to the practise of 'Conversion Therapy'.

The Conference in 1993 agreed the following resolution:

'Conference recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. Conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality'.

The Conference notes that in 2021 the Methodist Council Report MC21/50: Deliverance Ministry endorsed the following recommendation:

'Deliverance ministry must not be used to attempt to change a recipient's sexual orientation or gender identity'.

The Conference notes that 'Conversion Therapy' would be totally incompatible with the previously agreed resolutions described above and would be contrary to the Methodist values set out in the Connexional Definition and Guidance on Homophobia.

The Conference agrees:

- (1) to support and adopt the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' definition of conversion therapy as quoted above,
- (2) to call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form.
- (3) that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the Methodist Church.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to consider, draft and publish a policy on 'Conversion Therapy' in light of points (1) to (2) of this response, and to consider further the most appropriate way in which to engage with HM Government on this issue.

M21 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Birmingham (5/1) Circuit Assembly (Present: 86; Voting: 85 for, 0 against) believes that Methodism needs a more robust process for hearing and processing reported cases

of inequality, discrimination, or exclusion, in a parallel way to that which is in place for safeguarding.

Whilst we welcome all the work already done by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Task Group centrally, and wanting to build upon the report from Methodist Council last year, item 22/8a part (v), we believe more is needed. We propose a central robust process to deal with complaints about inequality, discrimination and exclusion within our churches and church structures.

This will require clear and comprehensive guidelines for hearing and dealing with such complaints, against,

- a) robust criteria
- b) a central policy
- c) clear procedures which can be applied to every situation.

We believe that such a framework would enable a higher level of trust in our denomination from those facing discrimination and give those who are fighting these injustices a firm platform from which to act.

This memorial comes as a direct reaction to the racial discrimination faced by members of our Circuit which has emerged as we have responded to the Black Lives Matter movement and during our engagement with the EDI agenda set by the Conference, including the wider issues of discrimination raised.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham Circuit for its memorial and recognises, with huge sadness, the experience of racial discrimination reported in this memorial.

The Conference appreciates the call in this memorial for more robust processes for hearing and processing reported cases of inequality, discrimination, or exclusion, and agrees that this needs to be in a parallel way to that which is in place for safeguarding.

The Birmingham Circuit is thanked for its support of the work already done by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and for the ongoing work of the Inclusive Church Implementation Group.

The Conference refers the Circuit to the *Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Inclusion* (Agenda item 56) which agrees with the urgent need for the building of a higher level of trust in our denomination from those facing discrimination. The recommendations R3 a), R3 b) and R3c) are intended to explore ways of giving those who are fighting injustices a firm platform from which to act.

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Acknowledging that the review of the Complaints Process (Part 11 of the Standing Orders) is underway and will report to the 2022 Conference, the Conference agrees that a robust process to deal with complaints about inequality, discrimination and exclusion within our churches and church structures must be assured, including:

- a) robust criteria
- b) a central policy
- c) clear procedures which can be applied to every situation.

The Conference therefore accepts the memorial and directs the group reviewing Part 11 to include it in its work.

M22 Slave Trade

The Northampton District Synod (Present: 170; Voting: 151 for, 3 against) acknowledges the prevalence of ignorance and apathy about the injustices suffered by black and brown members of society as a consequence of the attitudes and practices of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We recognise and regret the lasting damage this has done to any hopes for a just and equitable world. We acknowledge the unequal treatment of black and brown people (the descendants of Transatlantic slaves and of those countries from which slaves were forcibly removed) who continue to suffer the reinforcement of negative attitudes and stereotypes. We also acknowledge that many white people continue to enjoy the benefits of the dehumanisation, control, wealth and privilege, which resulted from the Transatlantic Slave Trade, to the detriment of slave descendants.

The Northampton District asks the Conference to recognise and repent of our collective ignorance and apathy which has prevented us from re-educating ourselves, from cultivating Christian commitment to equality and equity for all human beings, and from taking transformative steps to repair the damage done. This sinful attitude to brothers and sisters has prevented us from acknowledging our need to seek to make reparation and has often resulted in our unquestioning acceptance of benefits which belonged to others, perpetuating the racial injustices of this country.

We repent of our lack of faithfulness to the work of the early abolitionists (not restricted to, but including John Wesley) and our complicity in a society which failed or refused to recognise this injustice, following the abolition of the slave trade (1807) and then the practice of slavery itself (1838). We have been inspired by the tenacity of the slaves themselves, the witness of freed slaves and their descendants, and fellow Methodists from African, African-American, and Caribbean contexts to racial injustice, and by the other

Christian organizations taking this same action.⁴

Responding requires the dismantling of structures which perpetuate injustice against black and brown people and the cultivation of attitudes and practices which restore and reinforce the equity of black and brown humanity, in personhood, mission and ministry. The Methodist Church needs to take transforming steps to repair the damage through restoration, reconciliation and reparations. Making reparations is intrinsic to apology, justice and restoration. Yet reparations cannot alone tackle the root of injustice.

Above all, we ask the Conference to recognise the sin of not taking these actions, in the light of our commitment to witnessing to a God of justice and love.

We acknowledge the work that has been begun by the Connexional Team to assess and address some of these injustices, and therefore ask the Conference to welcome this work on the Legacies of Slavery.

We also call upon the Conference to work towards making a full apology for our unquestioning acceptance of the benefits of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and, acknowledging that apology is validated only by actions of repair, ask the Methodist Council to identify ways in which the Methodist Church might commit to:

- a) educating, re-training and re-committing ourselves to justice and anti-racism
- b) making reparations for any legacy of financial benefit from the Transatlantic slave trade which the Methodist Church in Britain may have inherited, knowingly or not;

and to report on our progress to the Conference in 2022.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Northampton District for its memorial and support of the work that has already commenced in this area.

In 1978, the Methodist Church in Britain made the following statement in regard to racism:

“Racism is a sin and contrary to the imperatives of the Gospel. Biblically, it is against all that we perceive of the unmotivated, spontaneous and indiscriminating love of God who in Jesus Christ gave himself for all”.

4 See, for example, the Council for World Mission Legacies of Slavery - Council for World Mission (cwmmission.org) and the United Reformed Church Legacies of Slavery (urc.org.uk) (both accessed on 5th March 2021)

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The Conference acknowledges the impact and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade on British society and the Church. The Conference recognises the resultant injustices suffered by enslaved African people and their descendants as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. The Conference further acknowledges the subsequent inequalities faced by black and brown people in Britain today, and accepts that British society has benefited from the economy of slavery/ empire and that its legacies live on today. In addition, the Conference accepts that in turn the Methodist Church would have benefited from the transatlantic slave trade, irrespective of any direct involvement of individuals within the Church.

A small group within the Connexional Team has been convened, drawing on expertise within the Connexion and externally, to consider the full scope of work required to uncover and understand the extent to which Methodist churches might have benefitted directly or indirectly from the transatlantic slave trade. The group will also explore and recommend the full breadth of reparations required for the injustices suffered by enslaved people, the scope of any public statements including and associated apology. In addition, the group will explore the need for further education and training on the relationship between contemporary racism, identity, colonialism and the slave trade. This work will continue and future reports will be brought to the Methodist Council.

The Methodist Council report MC/21/32 Methodist Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity report has made specific recommendations on the work and training required to bring about an anti-racist Church and the Conference believes that the requests contained in this memorial will be included in that work.

M23 Human Sexuality (2020)

The Plymouth Mission (24/2) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: unanimous) thanks the Conference and its working parties for the hard work done on the difficult issue of human sexuality. The Circuit recognises the work done to hold disparate parts of the Church together in love despite great differences. However, having taken so long and careful a journey to arrive at this point, it is with sadness and regret that we find the Methodist people disenfranchised from such a significant decision within the life of the church. Despite our polity, the Circuit feels that District Synods are rarely representative of the broad Methodist constituency and therefore calls on the Conference to maintain the resolutions on human sexuality in their provisional form for a further year and seek a recorded vote of each Church Council and Circuit Meeting within the Connexion to ascertain the support for such a change in doctrine and practice.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Plymouth Mission Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's

forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate *God in love unites us* as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Synods have now voted and the provisional resolutions return to the Conference. The votes in the Synods followed a lengthy period of discussion around the Connexion; many Local Churches and Circuits hosted events aided by those representing divergent opinions on these matters and resources were available to assist all church members in reading the report and thinking through its recommendations. The Conference also notes that these discussions were the successors to conversations that have been taking place around the Connexion for many years.

The Conference agrees that it could, were it so minded, amend the resolutions and adopt them as provisional resolutions; however, to require Church Councils and Circuit Meetings to express a view would need a change in our procedures (under SO 122). Such consultation would be extraordinary and is only invoked when the Conference has considered a matter to be subject of a deferred special resolution and touching on the doctrinal standards. Given the clear advice of the Faith and Order Committee that the adoption of the provisional resolutions would not constitute a change in our doctrine, the Conference does not believe that it is necessary to invoke such a process of consultation.

Neither does the Conference believe it necessary to make the resolutions that return to it this year provisional, given the lengthy process of formal and informal debate that there has been around the Connexion. The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M24 God in Love Unites Us

The Torbay (24/8) Circuit Meeting (Present: 26; Voting: 23 for, 3 against) notes that the *God in love unites us* report:

1. affirms same-sex marriage and cohabitation as Christian options;
2. proposes two contradictory definitions of marriage which it would be impossible for those who do not accept same-sex marriage to affirm;
3. envisages a situation in which some presbyters, church members and Local Churches will accept and endorse same-sex marriages, and others will not;
4. would, if implemented, constitute a radical change of doctrine and a break with thousands of years of biblical interpretation, still held by the vast majority of the World Church, that marriage as God intended it to be is a union between one man and one woman for life.

Accordingly, in view of the momentous and contentious nature of the proposals, the

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Circuit calls upon the Conference to delay for a further year the vote on ratification and to direct the Methodist Council in the intervening year:

- (a) to ensure that the whole Methodist people are fully engaged with the report and its recommendations in a meaningful way
 - (i) through a circulation of a summary of the report and its specific proposals and the likely implications both of adopting them and not adopting them, and
 - (ii) by having recorded votes on the proposals at Church Councils and Circuit Meetings which are reported to the Conference of 2022
- (b) to consult ecumenical and World Church bodies on the implications of adopting and not adopting the proposals for British Methodism's relationships with other Christians and report on its findings to the Conference of 2022.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Torbay Circuit and gives the same reply to part (a) as to M23.

The 2019 Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a group of persons representing the Law and Polity Committee, the Faith and Order Committee and the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, to receive the reports of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee and to report to the Conference with appropriate resolutions, including a statement of the ecumenical implications as required under Standing Order 121(2). The report on the provisional resolutions brought to the 2021 Conference was prepared by that group and includes comments from conversations that have taken place with global and ecumenical partners. The Conference's reply to (b) is therefore contained in that report.

M25 God in Love Unites Us

The Black Country (28/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 30; Voting: 21 for, 1 against) notes the extensive work that the Conference and other working parties have done to hold the Church together in unity on the sensitive issue of marriage and relationships.

However, there is a sense by some people that if the Conference approves the resolutions contained in the *God in love unites us*" report without first allowing churches to vote on the issues, then many of our people will feel disenfranchised.

An important element for the outcome of *God in love unites us* is ownership by Methodist people. Without that ownership, this matter may create irreparable divisions. With this solely in mind, the Black Country Circuit asks that the Conference actions the necessary

procedures which will ensure that churches vote on the matter prior to the Conference's implementation of the resolutions contained in the *God in love unites us* report.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Black Country Circuit for its memorial and is grateful for the commendation of the work that has been done. The Conference has always been mindful of the sensitivity of the issues in *God in love unites us* and recognises the care with which discussions have been held around the Connexion. The Conference chose to follow a carefully designed process to discern the mind of the Connexion in 2019 rather than to make a decision without any reference to the Districts.

The Conference declines the memorial and further refers the Circuit to its reply to M23.

M26 God in Love Unites Us

The North Kent (36/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38; Voting: 23 for, 15 against) refers the Conference to resolution 10/9 of *God in love unites us*.

Given the emotive and polarising nature of these debates, we are asking the Conference to consider that the voting on item 10/9 of the Marriage and Relationship report should be via secret ballot (one member, one vote) in every Local Church and reported back to the Conference through Circuits and Districts, recording votes for, against, and abstentions.

Reply

The Conference thanks the North Kent Circuit for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M25.

M27 Conference Voting – God in Love Unites Us

The Yeovil and Blackmore Vale (26/5) Circuit Meeting (Present: 32; Voting: 25 for, 5 against) notes that the issues raised in the *God in love unites us* report are pastorally very sensitive within churches and potentially divisive. In view of this, the Conference should agree by a majority of two-thirds or more, to the changes proposed. Similarly, if individual churches are asked to vote, any change should be agreed by two thirds or more of those eligible to vote.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yeovil and Blackmore Vale Circuit for its memorial. The Conference decided in 2019 to adopt some of the resolutions in the report *God in love*

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unites us as provisional resolutions under Standing Order 122. The process outlined there is one that has been carefully followed around the Connexion. The District Policy Committees have arranged the consultation that each deemed appropriate and the Circuit will be aware of the range of resources which were made available to enable every church and Circuit to engage with the report; those conversations, the Conference believes, informed the debates at each Synod.

The Conference therefore considers whether or not to confirm the provisional resolutions confident that there has been careful discernment in the Synods' voting. The report of the group charged with gathering the Synod responses notes that only one Synod did not approve all the provisional resolutions and that where the resolutions were approved in only two Synods was it by less than two thirds of those present and voting.

Standing Order 122 makes no provision for the Conference to vote other than by a simple majority nor for the Conference to devise a different process to discern the will of the Connexion. It is precisely because the issues involved are sensitive and potentially divisive that the Conference believes the process under Standing Order 122 carefully and prayerfully followed was the right process. The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M28 God in Love Unites Us (2020)

The West Cornwall (12/9) Circuit Meeting (Present: 33; Voting: 30 for, 2 against) calls the Conference's attention to the short period of consultation provided for this Circuit and its eighteen churches to discuss and respond to the report *God in love unites us*. We believe that the original and conventional timeframe of two years for such momentous issues should have been adhered to. Not only will the curtailed procedure lead to poor decisions, the impression is given that the Conference is rushing this potentially divisive legislation through, and that just when connexional unity is of the essence, people in our chapels feel disenfranchised and alienated from the Conference.

Reply

The Conference thanks the West Cornwall Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate *God in love unites us* as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Synods have now voted and the provisional resolutions return to the Conference. The votes in the Synods followed a lengthy period of discussion around the Connexion; many Local Churches and Circuits hosted events aided by those representing divergent opinions on these matters and resources were available to assist all church members in

reading the report and thinking through its recommendations. The Conference also notes that these discussions were the successors to conversations that have been taking place around the Connexion for many years.

The Conference agrees that it could, were it so minded, amend the resolutions and adopt them as provisional resolutions; however, to require Church Councils and Circuit Meetings to express a view would need a change in our procedures (under SO 122). Such consultation would be extraordinary and is only invoked when the Conference has considered a matter to be subject of a deferred special resolution and touching on the doctrinal standards. Given that the clear advice of the Faith and Order Committee that the adoption of the provisional resolutions would not constitute a change in our doctrine, the Conference does not believe that it is necessary to invoke such a process of consultation.

Neither does the Conference believe that it is necessary to make the resolutions that return to it this year provisional, given the lengthy process of formal and informal debate that there has been around the Connexion.

The Circuit refers to an original timetable of two years. This alludes to the remit of the Task Group to bring a draft Conference statement under SO 129 to the 2018 Conference. However, that Conference received an additional report from the Task Group which included the following:

Of the matters referred to the Task Group the most pressing issues concern the Church's understanding of relationships and marriage. Such matters could be dealt with by a report to the Conference that sets out a number of theological arguments. A report would not be as detailed as a Conference Statement, but would enable the Conference to reach a view on how the church defines marriage and for that view to be the subject of connexion wide consultation. The same report could include any changes to standing orders were the definition of marriage to change. Such a report would be treated as provisional resolution under SO 122. It would be submitted to the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee for approval, disapproval, or approval with amendments. This would take place during the year 2019-2020. The Conference of 2020 would then be in a position to make a final decision with any provisions implemented with immediate effect. None of this prevents a Statement of the Conference being presented at a later stage.

Nothing would prevent Local Churches, Circuits and individual members of the Methodist Church feeding in opinions through their Synods. This process would allow for proper consultation, but also meet the sense of urgency being expressed by many in these matters. It would also make it easier for the Task Group to produce material of the highest quality. (DR 7/17/2)

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The Conference agreed with the Task Group that the sense of urgency was such that the alternative process proposed should be adopted and the Task Group was asked to bring a report with provisional resolutions under SO 122. *God in love unites us* therefore does not have the status of a Conference Statement and the Conference does not believe that it is helpful or appropriate further to extend the consultation on it. The Conference declines the memorial.

M29 God in Love Unites Us (2020)

The Crosby (18/8) Circuit Meeting (Present: 23; Voting: 22 for, 1 against) notes that paragraph 2.6.4 of the Report, *God in love unites us* reads: The Church recognises that the love of God is present within the love of human beings who are drawn to each other, and who enter freely into some form of like enhancing committed relationship with each other, whether that be through cohabitation or a more formal commitment entered into publicly”.

If the report is passed, does this mean that a male presbyter and his girlfriend or a female presbyter and her boyfriend, living in a sexual relationship, may reside together in the manse, (or any other dwelling) with the approval of the conference? The Circuit asks the Conference for clarity on this matter.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Crosby Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate *God in love unites us* as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Conference recognises that the report takes a more positive view of cohabitation than has often been the case in some parts of the Church in the past. It draws attention, however, to the order in which the provisional resolutions have been considered by the Synods and will be debated in the Conference and believes that the report's approach to cohabitation should be understood in the light of what the report says about the qualities of relating, viz., that all significant relationships 'should be built on self-giving love, commitment, fidelity, loyalty, honesty, mutual respect, equality and the desire for the mutual flourishing of the people involved'.

Should the Conference adopt the resolutions before it on relationships and cohabitations, it will have expressed a view about its expectations of Christian living for all in the Church. It has not been the custom of the Methodist people to treat differently those who are ordained in terms of expectations of personal behaviour and the Conference believes that it would be a denial of its belief in the Priesthood of All Believers to do

so. In common with all members of the Church, ordained persons witness through their fidelity to the love of God in Christ Jesus in their personal conduct and relationships and are accountable for the integrity of that witness. Trusting that those whom it has deemed worthy to be representative persons in the Methodist Church remain mindful of that, the Conference declines the memorial.

M30 God in Love Unites Us (2020)

The West Cornwall (12/9) Circuit Meeting (Present: 33; Voting: 26 for, 6 against) calls on the Conference to reject the provisional legislation before it, which would allow same-sex marriage to occur on Methodist trust property.

It does so on the grounds that the biblical analysis of both Greek and Hebrew texts in the report is woefully inadequate and flawed. This has resulted in the report's laudable aims of love and inclusion leading to a compromise of the Gospel. Furthermore, as part of a connexional church we reject the validity of 'opt-outs' when it comes to ethics.

Reply

The Conference thanks the West Cornwall Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate 'God in love unites us' as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Conference will make its decision on the resolutions that were provisionally adopted in 2019 when it debates the report from the group collating the Synod responses and believes that the reply to the memorial is contained in the resolutions it adopts in that report and the report of the Faith and Order Committee.

M31 God in Love Unites Us and Church Buildings (2020)

The Gornal and Sedgley (28/14) Circuit Meeting (Present: 25; Voting: Unanimous) requests that, should the Methodist Conference adopt the changes to marriage practice recommended in the *God in love unites us* report, Societies and Circuits who cannot agree to this change of doctrine and practice be allowed to leave the Methodist Connexion with their buildings and such monies as are deposited in the Central Finance Board on behalf of Local Churches. Since the buildings were freely transferred to the Trustees for Methodist Church purposes under the Methodist Church Act 1976, we request that they be freely returned to the current managing trustees, who will once again be custodians of their own buildings.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the Gornal and Sedgley Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate 'God in love unites us' as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Conference is saddened that there should be those who feel that they are unable to remain within the Methodist Church should the Conference adopt the resolutions that have been considered by the Synods. It reminds the Circuit that this is a subject on which the Church has lived for many years with contradictory convictions and draws attention to the provisions in the report and the resolutions to safeguard the position of those who cannot agree with the changes. The Conference notes the Faith and Order Committee's advice that this is not a change in doctrine and reaffirms that no Managing Trustees will be pressured into registering their buildings for same-sex marriage.

Nevertheless, it is possible that some Methodist members may conclude that they can no longer travel with the Church. It is important to note that there is no provision for churches or Circuits to 'secede' (ie withdraw) from the Connexion; individual members need to resign their membership in order to leave. It is possible that in some places a majority and perhaps even a unanimity of the members might opt to leave the Church and form another ecclesial community or align with or form a congregation or denomination. Should that happen, the managing trusteeship of the church would pass under the Model Trusts to another Church Council in the Circuit or to the Circuit Meeting. The new Managing Trustees might then consider selling the property to the newly-formed church or, possibly, leasing it under Model Trust 14(2A) (if the Conference adopts the deferred special resolution of 2019 to allow such leases).

The Conference is mindful that whilst in many minds the church building belongs to the local worshipping community, the property (and any funds of the Local Church) are held on trust for the purposes of the Methodist Church in Great Britain and cannot simply be given to a separate organisation. Charity law generally requires charities wishing to dispose of their property to do so on the 'best terms that can reasonably be obtained'⁵, although charities may sell to other charities at less than best price in certain circumstances. Model Trust 20 provides for this latter possibility if 'any purpose of the Church would thereby be advanced', but each application by Managing Trustees to sell at less than best price under Model Trust 20 needs to be considered by the Methodist Council on a case-by-case basis.

5 section 119 Charities Act 2011

The Methodist Council has considered carefully the matter of secession and has taken legal advice on the application of Model Trust 20 in such circumstances. The conclusion reached, based on the legal advice received, is that it is difficult to see how any sale at an undervalue to those who leave the Church dissenting from the decision taken in adopting the resolutions in *God in love unites us* would advance any “purpose of the Methodist Church” (as defined by section 4 of the Methodist Church Act 1976). The Council therefore chose not to recommend that further work be undertaken to explore whether changes to Standing Orders could be made that would help accommodate any requests which may be made. It may however be possible for Managing Trustees to approach the Charity Commission for advice as to whether it would be permissible to sell at less than best price in individual cases.

Since the Conference recognises the pain which this issue has caused in some churches and Circuits, it directs the Law and Polity Committee to explore the question further and to advise the Council on the policy issues arising. Beyond that, the Conference has no choice but to decline the memorial.

M32 The ‘Annual Enquiry’ - Transitional Arrangements - Marriage and Relationships within the Methodist Church (2020)

The Upper Thames (7/23) Circuit Meeting (Present: 24; Voting: 20 for, 2 against) notes the extensive work that the Conference and successive working parties have undertaken to hold the Church together on the sensitive issues of marriage and relationships. If the 2021 Conference approves the provisional resolutions from the *God in love unites us* report, some ordained ministers and lay preachers will feel, on a matter of conscience, that they will no longer be able to affirm positively the ‘annual enquiry’ at Presbyteral Synod and the Local Preachers Meeting. The Upper Thames Circuit requests that the Conference adopts a transitional period of three years in which ministers and Lay Preachers are not required to assent to the revised discipline of the Church and will continue to remain in good standing. It further asks the Conference to direct the Faith and Order and the Law and Polity committees to undertake further work regarding the status of such ministers and lay preachers and the implications of these changes for their ministries and, for ministers, their livelihoods.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Upper Thames Circuit for its memorial.

Presbyters are asked at the Synod to affirm that each continues ‘to believe and preach our doctrines and observe and administer our discipline’. During the Convocation deacons are asked to renew the promise they made at ordination to ‘believe the doctrines of the Christian faith as this Church has received them’. It is pertinent to note

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that the term 'our doctrines' also appears in the list of the duties of local preachers with the explanation that 'the term "our doctrines" refers to those truths of salvation which are set forth in the Methodist doctrinal standards.' (SO 563(2)(ii)) The doctrinal standards are those which are set out in clause 4 of the Deed of Union.

The advice of the Faith and Order Committee, contained in its report to the Conference and in the report of the group collating the responses of the Synods to *God in love unites us*, is that if the Conference votes to confirm that the provisional resolution which recognises that in the Church there are two understandings of marriage it will not thereby make a decision that necessitates a change to clause 4 of the Deed. The affirmations that presbyters, deacons and local preachers are asked to make, therefore, will be no different in 2022 from those which were made in 2021 whatever the decision of the Conference on the provisional resolutions.

Presbyters are also asked if they continue to 'observe and administer our discipline'. Deacons are asked to reaffirm that they 'accept our discipline, and work together with your sisters and brother in the Church'. Local preachers are also in their annual recommitment expected to indicate their intention to abide by the discipline of the Church. The recognition of two different understandings of marriage and the Standing Orders which would describe those and make provision for those of contradictory convictions to continue to worship and minister together (should the Conference confirm the provisional resolutions and with them the proposed changes to the Standing Orders) would be a small change in our discipline (in that it requires those considering or invited to consider presiding at or being available for a same-sex wedding to take certain actions). The Conference nevertheless believes that the provisions that are made to safeguard the position of those who are prevented from officiating at same sex weddings by reason of conscience are such that no one should be unable to administer and observe the discipline by reason of conscience. It notes that very similar provision has been in place for many years with regard to the marriage of divorced persons whose previous spouse is still alive.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M33 God in love unites us

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District Synod (Present: 112; Voting: 63 for, 42 against) requests that, in the light of the Conference's vote on resolutions 10/8 and 10/9 of the *God in love unites us* report, and bearing in mind that the Methodist Church is committed to a policy of inclusion and mutual respect, the following be put into place: should any minister, feeling that they can no longer affirm our doctrinal standards, policy nor administer our discipline, feel compelled to resign from the Methodist ministry; that they be offered a just, gracious and generous exit process in accordance with the best practice of the Methodist Church.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Synod for its memorial and notes the affirmation of the Conference's commitment to inclusion and mutual respect. The subject matter of the resolutions which have been brought with the report *God in love unites us* has been debated in the Connexion for many years and the Conference is grateful for the spirit of the conversations as those of very different viewpoints have met in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The Conference believes that through such debates the Spirit speaks to the Church and there is much to be learned from the breadth of the theological spectrum that has been revealed during the conversations.

The Conference refers the Circuit to its reply to M32 on the affirmations made annually by ministers and local preachers. The Conference therefore sincerely hopes that no minister nor any local preacher would feel that they can no longer affirm our doctrinal standards or administer our discipline. Nevertheless, the Conference accepts that some ministers might find it difficult to remain in Full Connexion with the Conference if the resolutions in *God in love unites us* are adopted.

It is a sad moment when a minister chooses to apply to resign. The Synod asks for those who do so to be offered a just, gracious and generous exit. The resignation process always allows the minister to meet a panel and to discuss his or her concerns before the President accepts the resignation; the District Chair always offers pastoral care and support to those who feel that they must resign. It is hard to see how the process might be unjust; the Conference expects that it is always gracious.

The Conference recognises that those who resign might be leaving behind their livelihood and home. This would certainly be the case for most in the active work. Stipends and manses are provided as part of the covenant relationship with the Conference and for the support of ministry. If the Synod implies that financial provision should be offered to those who have chosen to leave, the Conference regrets that it cannot direct such provision to be made. It would not be appropriate to use the resources of the Church which have been given for the work of the Methodist Connexion to benefit those who choose no longer to share in that work. Nevertheless, the Conference directs any such resignation advisory committee to consider carefully the financial circumstances of those who resign in advising the President as to the date at which the resignation be accepted (and therefore the stipend payment ceasing and the minister having to leave the manse).

The Conference notes a particular concern for those who are currently or who hope to be resident after sitting down, in a property owned by the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society (MMHS). MMHS has resolved that, if already a ministerial resident of MMHS, a minister will be permitted to remain as a resident on the same terms as ministerial residents and, if in active service up until the point of resignation, a minister will still

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be able to apply to become a resident of MMHS noting that they will have to satisfy all standard eligibility criteria apart from being in Full Connexion. This compassionate concession on the part of MMHS applies only to resignations arising from Conference's vote on resolutions 10/8 and 10/9 of the *God in love unites us* report. The Conference does not believe that beyond this it is necessary to direct any action be taken.

M34 Marriage and relationships and the annual affirmation

The Plymouth and Exeter District Synod (Present: 103; Voting: 92 for, 11 against) recognises that the decisions made by this year's Conference about the Methodist understanding of marriage will make it difficult for some ministers to make the annual affirmation of our doctrines. The Synod is also mindful of the covenant relationship between the Conference and its ordained ministers, and that having to leave the ministry would create significant issues of housing, finance and employment for some.

The Synod, therefore, asks the Conference to treat non-assent, specifically to the understanding of marriage, as a pastoral rather than a disciplinary matter for three years, to allow for a time of reflection and adjustment.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Plymouth and Exeter District Synod for the memorial and the pastoral concern that lies behind it.

Presbyters are asked at the Synod to affirm that each continues 'to believe and preach our doctrines and observe and administer our discipline'. During the Convocation deacons are asked to renew the promise they made at ordination to 'believe the doctrines of the Christian faith as this Church has received them'. It is pertinent to note that the term 'our doctrines' also appears in the list of the duties of local preachers with the explanation that 'the term "our doctrines" refers to those truths of salvation which are set forth in the Methodist doctrinal standards.' (Standing Order 563(2)(ii)) The doctrinal standards are those which are set out in clause 4 of the Deed of Union.

The advice of the Faith and Order Committee, contained in its report to the Conference and in the report of the group collating the responses of the Synods to *God in love unites us*, is that if the Conference votes to confirm the provisional resolution which recognises that in the Church there are two understandings of marriage it will not thereby make a decision that necessitates a change to clause 4 of the Deed. The affirmation that ministers are asked to make, therefore, will be no different in 2022 from that which was made in 2021 whatever the decision of the Conference on the provisional resolutions.

In declining the memorial, the Conference nevertheless agrees that the response a

Chair or the Warden makes to any presbyter or deacon who expresses reluctance to make the affirmation should be pastoral before it is disciplinary (inasmuch as the two can be separated from each other). The Conference believes that there is no need for any minister to put her or his status as being in Full Connexion with the Conference (and thereby their housing and income) at risk if the Conference confirms the provisional resolutions but would continue to urge those who deal with any ministers who feel that they must leave us to do so as far as is in their power with grace and generosity.

M35 Provisional Resolutions: God in love unites us - Marriage and Relationships (2020)

The Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay (9/7) Circuit Meeting (Present: 47; Voting: 35 for, 12 against) reflects that, since the publication of the Report on Marriage and Relationships produced on behalf of the Methodist Conference by the Task Group 2019, members of Orton Methodist Church have been saddened by the Report's proposals which were discussed at the 2019 Conference.

It is our belief that the Bible is the word of God, illuminated to us by the Holy Spirit. "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". 2 Timothy 3:16 (New International Version)

Marriage has a divine origin and is part of the pattern of God's good creation, deeply written into our existence. This is backed up in history and in society as well as in Scripture. God created male and female to live in union with each other – companions who were different and designed to work together, to complement each other, and to procreate. When asked a question about marriage, Jesus answered quoting words from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and expanded on them: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no-one separate." Matthew 19:4-6. The theme of marriage is threaded throughout the Bible and is so important that the whole biblical narrative both begins and ends with a marriage (Genesis 2 and Revelation 21). While the report mentions the importance of listening to the whole narrative of Scripture, it is our view that it fails to apply that principle to the way in which marriage and sexuality feature within the story-line of Scripture as a whole. The interdependence of male and female within marriage is a key part of the scriptural depiction of marriage, and it is this that allows it to feature as an image of God's relationship with Israel and in the New Testament, with the Church (Hosea 2:19; Ephesians 5:29-32). Marriage is not only a human covenant relationship between one man and one woman but it reflects the glorious relationship between Christ (the bridegroom) and his Church (the bride).

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The report ignores the way in which sexual intimacy within Scripture is advocated to be in the context of the marriage relationship. The biblical view is that sexual intimacy creates a physical and spiritual bond between husband and wife (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:28-33; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20), and so honouring that bond is a key reason for confining sexual intimacy to marriage. Sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage are forbidden (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18), and this is emphasised by Jesus (Matthew 5:27-30). The report departs from the view that “traditional” biblical marriage is the only God-given place for sexual intimacy, and advocates that the Church should no longer require chastity (ie celibacy) for the unmarried. Whilst it is true to say that the reality of many of our lives and that of society is that they do not always work out according to God’s ideal, we agree with the view that Scripture teaches that any sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage falls short of that ideal.

The report rightly reflects on the attributes of a loving relationship and we should recognise that not all relationships are loving, nurturing and encouraging. However, it also argues that the qualities of relationships are what is important, and so all relationships – including sexual relationships – which exhibit good qualities, also reflect the presence of God’s love. This is quite a leap from recognising that couples who are not married do still exhibit attributes of a loving relationship to saying that they reflect the presence of God. There is an implication that if we as Methodist Christians do not agree with the view that all relationships displaying love which do not fall into the traditional form of marriage necessarily reflect the presence of God’s love, then we lack love towards others and in particular those who are LGBTQI+. We believe that as Christians we seek to welcome all people lovingly, as Jesus does, regardless of sexuality or gender; the Gospel is for all. We also recognise that we are all from a “fallen world”. (Romans 3:23). That is not to say that because we accept all of humanity that we agree with how they choose to live their lives or as God’s people should change Scripture to suit current trends in society or should deviate from God’s plan and ideal. God is the God of Truth, Holiness and Hope as well as Love and if we change his Word where it suits us, how can we as Christians have a sure foundation?

The report implies that it listens to what the Church and its historical view of marriage has been, yet it ignores that the Church has consistently throughout the centuries held the view that marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman.

The report also fails to consider the views and testimony of those who have feelings for people who are of the same sex, yet remain celibate in order to stay true to Scripture. Indeed, they also do not look at the fact that Jesus himself was a celibate male and the Apostle Paul commends those who choose to be celibate rather than married.

Far from offering a way forward for the Church, we feel that *God in love unites us* is unlikely to preserve the unity of the Church and threatens to separate Methodism from its biblical

foundations, asking us to commit to a new teaching on marriage that contradicts our convictions. The report fails to help Methodists live more faithfully before God, and hinders the calling of the Church to ‘spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.’

We would therefore propose the following amendments to Conference Provisional Resolutions.

Proposed 10/7 to read:

G2 “Legally, marriage is a contractual relationship entered into by two people who make solemn vows and commitments to each other, without either the nature of the marriage or the nature of the commitments being further defined under the law of the land. In the understanding of the Methodist Church, **marriage is a covenant relationship between a man and a woman, within God’s covenant of love with them.**”

G3 “The Methodist Church believes that marriage is an exclusive relationship, freely entered into with a life-long intention of uniting **a man and a woman** in body, heart, mind and soul. In it, God’s Spirit enables both partners to know the security of love and care, bringing to each other comfort and companionship, enrichment and encouragement, tenderness and trust. **Such marriage is the foundation for family life and when blessed with children, it is God’s chosen way for the continuance of mankind and the bringing up of children in security and trust. The union of husband and wife is in Scripture compared to the union of Christ and His Church.**”

G4 – delete this provisional guidance note/resolution

Proposed 10/9 to read:

The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:

011A Marriage (1) The Methodist Church believes that marriage **is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit between one man and one woman who freely enter it and is in accordance with God’s purposes.**”

Reply

The Conference thanks the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Tebay Circuit for its memorial and for the careful exploration of biblical material that it offers to the Conference.

The provisional resolutions are before the Conference in the report of the group directed to consider the responses of the Synods together with any amendments to the resolutions that the group collating responses agreed should be placed before

61. Memorials to the Conference

the Conference. The Conference's reply to this memorial is therefore contained in the resolutions which it adopts in response to that report.

M36 Marriage and Relationships (2020)

The Isle of Wight (26/11) Circuit Meeting (Present: 45; Voting: 35 for, 9 against) urges the Methodist Conference to maintain the traditional definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman as the only definition of marriage.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Isle of Wight Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate 'God in love unites us' as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Synods have now voted and the provisional resolutions return to the Conference. The Conference's reply to this memorial is therefore contained in its decisions on those resolutions.

M37 Remain Faithful

The Yeovil and Blackmore Vale (26/5) Circuit Meeting (Present: 32; Voting: 25 for, 6 against), asks:

- that the Methodist Church remains faithful to the present definition of marriage as set out in Standing Order O11A(1) – 'The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman' – and the conviction that such marriage is the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy.
- that the Methodist Church does not redefine marriage to include same sex marriage, nor authorise the solemnisation or blessing of same sex marriages or relationships on Methodist Church premises.
- that the Methodist Church does not affirm cohabitation.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yeovil and Blackmore Vale Circuit for its memorial. The questions that the Circuit raises are the subject of the provisional resolutions which the Conference adopted in 2019 and are submitted to this Conference for confirmation. The Conference's reply to this memorial is therefore contained in its decision on those resolutions.

M38 God in Love Unites Us

The North Kent (36/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38; Voting: 21 for, 17 against) proposes the following amendment to resolution 10/9:

Proposed amendment: Omit 10/9 011B (8): “No minister, probationer or member may agree to conduct a same-sex wedding without first notifying the District Chair.”

Reply

The Conference thanks the North Kent Circuit for its memorial.

The provisional resolutions are before the Conference in the report of the group directed to consider the responses of the Synod together with any amendments to the resolutions that the group collating responses agreed should be placed before the Conference. The Conference’s reply to this memorial is therefore contained in its decision on the resolutions in that report.

M39 God in Love Unites Us

The North Kent (36/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38; Voting: 12 for, 10 against) proposes the following amendment to resolution 10/9:

Proposed amendment to Resolution 10/9: reword the proposed version of SO 011A so that it reads: “*The Methodist Church believes that marriage is given by God to be a particular channel of God’s grace, and that it is in accord with God’s purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit. The Methodist Church affirms and makes provision in its Standing Orders for two definitions of marriage: as being between a man and a woman who freely enter into it; as being between any two people who freely enter into it.*”

Reply

The Conference thanks the North Kent Circuit for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M38.

M40 God in Love Unites Us

The North Kent (36/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38; Voting: 27 for, 11 against) asks the Conference to offer a corporate apology on behalf of those members of the Methodist Church who now feel regret and remorse at the way people with orientation other than heterosexual have been treated and rejected in the past, as this is reflective of the spirit of welcome and inclusion in the all-encompassing love of God.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the North Kent Circuit Meeting for its memorial. Since 1993, the Conference has 'recognised, affirmed and celebrated the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the Church.' It is a cause of sorrow to the Conference that anyone should feel that they have been treated in any way that was not affirming or did not celebrate their contribution to the life of the Church. Whatever decisions the Conference makes on the provisional resolutions from 2019, the Conference wishes to affirm that the Methodist Church is pleased to have in its membership and ministry (lay and ordained) those whose orientation is not heterosexual and is enriched by what they offer. The Conference notes that since 2016 a definition of homophobia has been included in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and it reiterates that such behaviour has no place in the Methodist Church.

The Conference therefore accepts the memorial. It offers to all who have been hurt by discriminatory attitudes and behaviours a full apology and draws attention to the report of the Inclusive Church Implementation Group which identifies the need to address such behaviours as a vital part of the the *Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Inclusion*.

M41 God in Love Unites Us

The Mid-Glamorgan (2/16) Circuit Meeting (Present: 33; Voting: unanimous) believes that there are three main issues associated with the *God in love unites us* proposals.

1. Biblical interpretation, which for many, is contrary to same sex marriages in church.
2. The ambiguity of holding two alternative doctrinal positions which could result in a legal charge of discrimination if a Church Council did not allow same sex marriages to take place in church or if a minister felt unable in good conscience to officiate
3. The scale of legal fees to defend such a case which could be beyond the resources of a Local Church or Circuit

The biblical interpretation which rejects same sex marriage in church has been well documented and opposing views remain both within Britain and the wider Methodist family. The genuine attempt to find mutual agreement has resulted in the proposal to describe marriage in alternative ways, as currently stated in our doctrines as being between one man and one woman, and also as between any two people. In order to hold these differing points of view together it has been suggested that a church council could refuse same sex marriages in the local church.

If this proposal is passed by the Conference, it is believed that Local Churches not permitting same sex marriages to take place in church will be open to legal action on the grounds of discrimination. Despite requests to clarify the legal position, there has

been no response from the Connexion. It is suggested that if a case is taken to court, churches will potentially face very high legal costs and if the case is lost members of such a church will be compelled either to accept such marriages or to leave the church.

We note that the Faith and Order Committee will be reflecting on *God in love unites us* directly to the Conference through the Conference Agenda for 2021 which will only be available in the lead up to the Conference. This means that churches and Circuits have discussed and Districts have voted on the provisional legislation without any guidance from a Faith and Order perspective. We suggest that this is very surprising and wholly unacceptable for such a far-reaching and sensitive proposed change of doctrine.

The Circuit therefore proposes that:

- a. No vote should be taken until the legal position is clarified.
- b. In the event of a legal test case, the Connexion should be responsible for any legal costs and damages.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Mid-Glamorgan Circuit for its memorial. It notes that in 2019 the Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a group of persons representing the Law and Polity Committee, the Faith and Order Committee and the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, to receive the reports of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee and to report to the Conference of 2020 with appropriate resolutions, including a statement of the ecumenical implications as required under Standing Order 121(2). This way of working has enabled the preparation of the resolutions for the 2021 Conference to be undertaken with advice from both the Law and Polity and Faith and Order Committees.

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act includes religious protections. “The Act reflects the Government’s commitment that no religious organisation or representative will be forced to conduct or participate in same sex marriage ceremonies. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the Act protects and promotes religious freedom through the Government’s ‘quadruple lock’. This ensures that religious organisations and their representatives can continue to act in accordance with their doctrines and beliefs on this issue.”⁶

6 Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act: A Factsheet https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306000/140423_M_SSC_Act_factsheet__web_version_.pdf#:~:text=The%20Marriage%20%28Same%20Sex%20Couples%29%20Act%202013%2C%20was,recognised%20as%20being%20married%20in%20England%20%26%20Wales

61. Memorials to the Conference

The quadruple lock referred to includes the following points:

- “Makes clear that a religious marriage ceremony of a same sex couple will only be possible if:
 - i. the governing body of the religious organisation has opted in by giving explicit consent to marriages of same sex couples; and
 - ii. the individual minister is willing to conduct the marriage, and
 - iii. if the ceremony takes place in a place of worship, those premises have been registered for marriages of same sex couples.
- Explicitly states that no religious organisation can be compelled by any means to opt in to marry same sex couples or to permit this to happen on their premises; and no religious organisation or representative can be compelled by any means to conduct religious ceremonies for same sex couples.”¹

With this in mind there is therefore protection in law for both those conducting marriages and individual churches. The Conference does not believe that, if the provisional resolutions are confirmed, the decisions of Managing Trustees are likely to be open to challenge in the courts. Furthermore, Managing Trustees are advised as a general rule to have trustee indemnity insurance, but the Conference wishes to assure the Circuit that any Managing Trustee facing legal action as a consequence of implementing a decision of the Conference would be supported by the resources of the Connexional Team and (if expenditure is incurred) connexional funds.

M42 God in love unites us

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District Synod (Present: 112; Voting: 55 for, 54 against) requests that, in the light of the Conference’s vote on resolutions 10/8 and 10/9 of the *God in love unites us* report, and bearing in mind that the Methodist Church is committed to a policy of inclusion and mutual respect, the following be put into place: that relevant insurance is taken out and monies ring-fenced so that continuing pastoral and financial aid/support can be offered to any Authorised Person or Managing Trustee who is the subject of litigation as a result of their unwillingness due to conscience objection, to conduct the marriage of same-sex couples or to allow such ceremonies to be conducted in the premises of which they are managing trustees.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District Synod for its memorial and adopts the same reply as to M41.

M43 Marriage and Relationships Report (2020)

The Aire and Calder (27/17) Circuit Assembly (Present: 74; Voting: 61 for, 10 against), which is the circuit meeting for this circuit, welcomes the thoughtful and wide-ranging report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group to the 2019 Conference. We note its focus on a “companionship” model of marriage and its conclusion that this applies as much to loving same-sex relationships as to those between a man and a woman. However, we are concerned that the important roles of families, social groups and communities, which form the overlapping contexts within which marriages will either succeed or suffer stress, are scarcely mentioned in the Report, despite the reference to relationships in its title. We therefore ask the Conference to instruct the working party, or some other group appointed for the purpose, to look further into this matter and report back to the Conference.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Aire and Calder Circuit for its memorial and for the Circuit's forbearance in awaiting a reply as the memorial was submitted in 2020. The reason for the delay was that the Conference was unable to debate *God in love unites us* as the Synods had not voted on the provisional resolutions.

The Conference recognises that the report covers only some of the very many issues about loving human relationships that have exercised the Conference over the years and is grateful to the Circuit for pointing the way to more potentially fruitful work in this area. The Conference agrees that all loving relationships of two persons exist within a number of other relationships, some of which (the families, friendship networks and communities to which parties belong) predate the couple's relationship and others (for example, through the birth or adoption of children) follow from it. All of these can be vehicles through which God's love is made known and the relationship of the couple is supported and it is therefore important, whatever the Conference's decision on *God in love unites us*, that they are topics of theological reflection.

Noting the considerable changes in society and in the Church over the last three decades, the Conference therefore accepts the memorial. Further noting that the Faith and Order Committee is already considering some of these matters, it directs the Faith and Order Committee to review the matters raised in this memorial and the 1992 statement and bring to the 2022 Conference some initial reflection and any recommendations for further work.