

57. 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 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 xii 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 and the Conference will have opportunity to consider its reply to the memorial in the context of its debate on that report.

Similarly, the Conference is sometimes invited to adopt the same reply to more than one memorial. This does not imply that the Memorials Committee has not considered each memorial carefully, but merely that the memorials ask the same or very similar things of the Conference.

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 7-11 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. The committee recommended 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 xiii).

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.

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M1 The Theology of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Cambridge Circuit Meeting (14/26) (Present: 28 voting: unanimous) wishes to draw the attention of the Conference to the recent reports on Artificial Intelligence in the media and the open letters from academics and technology industry leaders warning politicians and the wider world about the potential and the threat AI brings. It asks the Conference to consider the following action:

- To request that the Faith and Order Committee explore theology around AI in terms of the following:
 - a. The image of God
 - b. Prayer and sermon writing threats and opportunities using AI
 - c. The possible relationship and consequences of Online Communion and AI
 - d. The role of Methodist ministers and Lay Office holders and what if any functions can be undertaken by AI
 - e. The framework of this request understands that all of this will be explored within the remit of the EDI impact assessment tool

Reply

The Conference thanks the Cambridge Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for drawing attention to this important topic. The Conference shares the Circuit Meeting's recognition that AI is an ever-increasing part of life with implications for work, leisure, communication and much more. It raises a wide range of questions for the church, including with regard to theology, ethics and practice.

The range of issues identified by the Circuit Meeting do not only touch on the work of the Faith and Order Committee but, for example, also raise questions relevant to the work of the Ministries Committee and to the training and formation of people for a variety of roles within the Church. Alongside this, the Conference also notes that AI raises a range of questions in the wider public sphere (including questions of justice about the value of work and workers) and that these issues affect ecumenical partners as well as a range of other organisations.

The Conference agrees with the Circuit Meeting that the Methodist Church needs to give attention to questions raised by the use of artificial intelligence in a variety of contexts. It accepts the memorial and directs the Secretary of the Conference to establish a working party, with broad representation including from the Faith and Order Committee, Ministries Committee, theological education institutions and relevant members of the Connexional Team, to identify the issues that should be explored by the Methodist Church (including in their consideration those raised by the Circuit Meeting) and to offer reflections, guidance and policy proposals to the Conference.

M2 Disciplinary Process

The Westminster Circuit Meeting (35/3) (Present: 18, voting: unanimous) wishes to draw to the attention of the Conference the deep disquiet felt amongst members over the inordinate and unexplained delay in bringing to a conclusion disciplinary cases brought against members. The Westminster Circuit stresses it is committed to providing a safe Church for all. Nevertheless, we believe too many people and their families have been, and are, suffering unnecessarily by protracted investigations into complaints. Internal reviews are insufficient, there needs to be openness, transparency, and accountability. We believe this is an urgent matter and needs addressing before the conclusion of the current review that is being undertaken.

Because of the resulting and lengthy suspension, and a member not being permitted to attend worship or engage in Christian fellowship in the Circuit, pending the resolution of this case, circuit members can feel unable to offer meaningful support to persons concerned or members of their family. There is concern about the mental distress caused and about their spiritual wellbeing and that of the congregation to which they belong.

The Circuit Meeting requests that the Conference:

- a) Recognises that protracted investigations into complaints give rise to both unhealthy speculation about allegations in the Local Church and Circuits concerned, and a loss of trust and confidence in the investigating authorities;
- b) Recognises that, in spite of assertions to the contrary, suspensions are not regarded or understood by the majority of people, including Methodist Church members, as a neutral act;
- c) Introduces a feasible timescale during which processes relating to Complaints, including those involving disciplinary and/or safeguarding issues should be completed, as part of our Duty of Care;
- d) Makes clear to the Connexion to whom the Connexional Safeguarding Team is accountable and how the processes which they administer are evaluated and overseen.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the Westminster Circuit Meeting for the memorial and for raising these concerns.

The Conference recognises the stress that is experienced by those who find themselves subject to a complaint or at the centre of a safeguarding concern and agrees that the stress can be exacerbated by the length of time that the process of a complaint can take. However, the Conference notes that this can be for a number of reasons not all of which can always be mitigated.

The Conference understands that this issue was frequently raised during the Part 11 review. The report that is before the Conference includes recommendations on timescales which should go some way towards addressing the concerns the Circuit raises. Similarly, and as it considers the Part 11 review, the Conference will be asked to adopt a closer alignment between the processes of Safeguarding and those of Complaints and Discipline which should enable speedier resolution of those concerns which need consideration in both aspects.

The Conference notes the Circuit Meeting's concerns around the understanding of suspension being a neutral act. This is also being addressed in the Part 11 Review with some proposals relating to the communication and use of language around suspension. The guidance that is given to responsible officers is always that suspension should be used sparingly and as a last resort, but the Conference remains persuaded that it is sometimes necessary both to mitigate the risk of further (alleged) harm and to free the subject to concentrate on dealing with the matter.

The Safeguarding Team is part of the Connexional Team and, as such, has been accountable to the Methodist Council and will be accountable to the Connexional Council. The Conference has before it proposals to remodel the safeguarding function of the Connexion so that all Safeguarding Officers in Districts would be part of the same accountability structure. This will be the latest step in a series of provisions which, in 2018, ensured that all casework conducted across the Connexion was supervised by Connexional Team members.

The Safeguarding Committee is currently engaged in a series of audits of Safeguarding work and structures in the Districts. The Committee reports to the Council and to the Conference on all its activities, including on the recommendations and determinations it has made (see SO 232(5)). The Conference therefore believes that the accountability of the Committee and those who work as Safeguarding staff in both Connexion and Districts is already clear.

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The Conference therefore accepts the memorial but believes that no further action need be taken on the grounds that work is already being undertaken to cover the concerns raised in the memorial.

M3 Telling our Story

The Bramhall and Wythenshawe Circuit Meeting (19/15) (Present: 28 voting: in favour 26, against 0) notes and celebrates the progress made through the Safeguarding and Justice, Dignity and Solidarity modules to make people feel safe and valued in church. However, as the Christian message is increasingly marginalised in our twenty-first century society it is now even more important, as 'Our Calling' notes, to make disciples, which means that we focus on Jesus' command to be his witnesses. Paul in his letters acknowledges the multiplicity of different callings and not all of us are called to be evangelists, however many of us do not find it easy, or feel equipped, to share our faith even though Christ's command in Matthew is to all Christians to 'Go and make disciples of all nations.' In Christ, all of us have a story to tell. We are living in the midst of people who have lost hope. We believe that Christ's command still stands, and he is looking to us to tell our story of the hope we experience in our walk with him. Whilst it is good for us to have training in areas of governance and compliance, surely training in how to tell our story should have equal importance. We note previous voluntary initiatives such as *Time to Talk of God*, and current study material such as *Everyone an Evangelist*, but they do not have equal weighting as they are not mandatory. We call on the Conference to provide the tools that can be used in our Districts, Circuits and Local Churches that will enable, encourage and equip us to tell the story of our faith.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bramhall and Wythenshawe Circuit for its memorial.

The Conference notes that the engagement of resources such as *Everyone an Evangelist* – produced to help embed the commitments of *God For All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth* (and mentioned in the memorial) – has been widespread. 789 copies of the course have been distributed around the Connexion since 2021, with very good feedback. Additionally, 242 ordained and lay leaders have been trained through the *Evangelism for Leaders* multi-session course.

God For All (approved by the 2020 Conference for an initial five years and currently before the 2024 Conference for potential extension from 2025 to 2032) offers a range of guidance, resources, and accompaniment around evangelism, missional growth and leadership, discipleship/Methodist Way of Life, and starting New Places for New People and Church at the Margins communities. Local individuals, groups, churches, Circuits, and Districts are encouraged to discern for themselves which of the available tools might support and equip them in *Our Calling* to respond to the Gospel

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of God's love in Jesus Christ and to live out discipleship in worship and mission. The Conference notes that many churches and Circuits have appreciated being able to discern for themselves how to best engage with the materials; it is encouraged in hearing testimonies from churches stepping out in mission and evangelism from around the Connexion, often as a direct result of the *God For All* resources and sometimes through other resources, as well.

For many years, prioritising evangelism has been a challenge for many churches and Circuits. While many of these reasons are understandable and flow from complicated theological histories, the Conference realises that if we are to be a Church that is at once inclusive, justice-seeking, growing, *and* evangelistic, it will be helpful to ask Local Churches and communities to prioritise their commitment to vibrant, healthy evangelism – including starting New Places for New People and Church at the Margins communities – in the years ahead.

The Conference notes memorials M19 and M20, which join this memorial in celebrating the importance of the mandatory trainings associated with Safeguarding and Justice, Dignity, and Solidarity whilst also asking for increased flexibility in order to train leaders in a way that continues to build adoption and confidence. The Conference holds that a Church fully committed to evangelism and growth must also be fully committed to safeguarding and justice. As *God For All* points out repeatedly, these crucial commitments must be an inseparable unity: any meaningful evangelism, mission, and pioneering or planting must include a deep value for the care and inclusion of all people, most especially those who are young and/or vulnerable.

The Conference notes that, whilst providing accessible and creative training resources, *God for All* places a stronger emphasis on experiential/action learning. Simply stated: we know that individuals and churches are more likely to grow in confidence as evangelists by *doing* evangelism – by getting into our local communities, making new friends, building trustworthy relationships, and having meaningful conversations about spirituality, God, and faith but also by learning about evangelism. The Conference therefore suggests that churches, Circuits, and Districts, rather than simply engaging in evangelism training materials, commit to practical engagement of mission and evangelism in and with their local communities. One way of supporting this aspiration might be to challenge every church on an annual basis to experiment with the annual evangelistic call proposed in *God For All: Strategic Update and Renewal (2025-2032)* (see pages 162 and 164 of Volume 1). This commitment would yield significantly increased evangelistic participation across the Methodist Church over the next decade.

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The Conference accepts this memorial in that it welcomes the suggestion that engagement in the *God for All* strategy should be much more highly prioritised (if not absolutely mandatory), whilst acknowledging that practical engagement (not just conceptual learning) is the desired fruit of the memorial, and whilst also honouring each church's and Circuit's discernment of the most contextually-wise ways of taking important and concrete next steps.

M4 Heritage Sites

The Calderdale Circuit Meeting (27/34) (Present: 41 voting: unanimous) recognises that there is a number of buildings and sites within the Connexion which have a significant role in telling the story of the origins and growth of Methodism. Four of these are formally recognised as museum sites (Wesley's Chapel, the New Room in Bristol, Epworth Old Rectory and Englesea Brook). They receive financial and practical support to enable them to be kept in good order and to continue to tell their part of the Methodist story. But these are not the only sites that are deemed so important to our history that they must not be sold or allowed to fall into disrepair, and the burden for keeping them open falls on local congregations or Circuits.

In the Calderdale Circuit we have the octagonal chapel at Heptonstall and Mount Zion at Ogden one of the earliest NMC chapels, whose societies have ceased to meet, and whose buildings, we have been told, have too great a historic significance to be sold. We are aware of others in a similar position across the Connexion. Whilst we agree that these sites should be preserved, we are also aware of the extra burdens in terms of finance and workload that these sites generate, because they are listed buildings and require extra care in any work that is carried out. We appreciate the work of the Conservation Officer and the Connexional Heritage Officer in all the work they do in offering advice and putting us in touch with other historic sites in order to share best practice. However, we do wonder if, as the Connexion has directed the Circuits to maintain these properties, some more assistance could be given to Circuits. We are not looking for the same level of support as the already acknowledged museum sites, but for some assistance with the maintenance and expertise required to maintain these properties.

Therefore the Calderdale Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to find ways to offer practical and financial support with both the running costs and the ongoing maintenance of the fabric of those buildings and sites deemed by the Connexion to be too historically significant to lose, so that local funds and volunteers can be focussed on using the buildings for outreach and mission as they tell the rich and varied stories of Methodist Heritage.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the Calderdale Circuit for its memorial.

The 2008 Conference identified the four properties mentioned in the memorial for connexional support because, as well as being significant to our heritage and being listed buildings, all were already accredited museums; marrying their architecture, collections, and stories from our essential history with contemporary mission. The funding they have received annually since 2011 has been based on supporting each site to employ a curator/manager, allowing the otherwise volunteer trustee and staff teams at each place at the time, to concentrate on developing missional outreach and visitor income, and seeking external funding for their major development schemes. In common with most heritage sites beyond the Church, while they do generate some income, our museums are not self-sufficient and need to secure additional, external grant funding, particularly for major maintenance needs and property development.

In 2011, the Conference recognised that our heritage is a Connexion-wide mission opportunity and not based in just these four historic house museums. Among the regions highlighted as having very significant historic properties was Yorkshire, and specifically Mount Zion and Heptonstall Chapels in Calderdale, both being Grade II* listed buildings (of which we have only c.50 examples in Methodism). It is the statutory responsibility of the managing trustees of all listed buildings to preserve and enhance the properties in their care. The Circuit can be assured of ongoing advice from the Methodist Heritage and Listed Buildings Advisory Committees (LBAC) and relevant Connexional Team members as it seeks to meet those responsibilities, and determine locally how these properties are to be used in the future, potentially to engage in mission in new and positive ways. However, it is the managing trustees' decision whether to retain any building and how best to use it to further mission.

John Wesley regularly visited Mount Zion, and the Conference congratulates Mount Zion on its 250th anniversary this year of Wesley first preaching there. Heptonstall has (the now very rare) octagonal plan structure favoured by Wesley. The Government's 2017 'Taylor Review', *Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals*, looked at how listed places of worship could become more sustainable through regular maintenance and repair and wider community involvement. The Conference commends the trailblazing work to the Sunday School building at Heptonstall, in partnership with the Friends' Group. Missional events are taking place in the community spaces on the first floor and worship within the chapel on a 'Festival Church' model, but consideration has been given to sustainability for the future and income generation as well.

The Conference recognises that this memorial may reflect challenges and opportunities replicated for other Circuits across the Connexion with significant Methodist historic places. Connexional funding for property development is limited

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to support for project feasibility studies. 'New Places for New People' funding could be available from the Districts (emphasising that this would be a conversation for each District though), for heritage sites and historic chapels where pioneering and church planting projects that meet the relevant criteria can be developed. The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and Heritage Committee will be considering the additional factors in managing historic property and using it for mission in 2024/2025. These committees will be aiming to collaborate closely and, working in consultation with district and circuit property stewards, local archivists and heritage volunteers, they will ensure they are offering complementary advice and review whether they should enhance together the guidance currently provided to managing trustees. The Heritage Committee would welcome the experience and advice of the Calderdale Circuit on what more could be helpful. This work will be 'mission-first' focused and aim to support the delivery of the 'God for All' strategy, and will explore meeting the challenges of inclusion/access and net zero commitments for those with responsibility for listed properties, for example.

Therefore, the Conference declines the memorial.

M5 Resourcing

The Burnley and Pendle Circuit Meeting (21/1) (Present: 38 voting: in favour 37, against 0) draws the Conference's attention to the tiredness and exhaustion felt by ministers and volunteers in churches and Circuits in the Connexion. More and more is required by the Conference of fewer people, many of whom have faithfully held roles in the Church for many years.

Whilst the Burnley and Pendle Circuit recognises that some of these requirements stem from government legislation or charity regulations, some stem from very worthy initiatives of the Methodist Council and Conference. These initiatives place too much pressure upon already tired people and dwindling resources.

The Burnley and Pendle Circuit requests a twelve month moratorium on any new initiatives from Methodist Council and Methodist Conference that will have a significant impact on churches and/or Circuits in terms of people's time and financial resources.

Further, we suggest that the whole Connexion spends a year in prayer, discerning where God is leading the Methodist Church of Great Britain at every level, focusing on what we should stop doing and what new things we can do to fulfil our mission of spreading Scriptural Holiness throughout our land.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the Burnley and Pendle Circuit for its memorial and for highlighting the importance of the mission of spreading scriptural holiness.

We are called to be a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church and over the last few years the Conference has adopted reports and strategies that are now in place - A justice seeking church, the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy, God for All, A Methodist Way of Life and Action for Hope. The Conference, therefore, declines the memorial as there is not a need for a moratorium as there are no current plans for any large scale initiatives.

The Conference encourages all Methodists as part of their Methodist Way of Life discipleship to pray, using the Methodist Prayer Handbook and to visit the Methodist Church's website where additional resources and tools can be found to explore the Church's commitments and to see them embedded in the wider life of the Church.

M6 Nassar Family

The Sheffield Circuit Meeting (Present: 69 voting: in favour 68, against 0) stands in prayerful solidarity with Daoud Nassar and his Christian family at their farm, Tent of Nations, near Bethlehem in the Occupied West Bank. Tent of Nations was awarded the Methodist World Peace Prize in 2017 in recognition of their principled Christian stance: "We refuse to be enemies."

Despite multiple attacks on their olive trees and other crops and violent assaults on themselves, they have maintained this position, and welcomed many international volunteers. Since the terrible events of 7 October 2023 in which of course they played no part, extra roadblocks and Israeli checkpoints have been put in place to make access to the farm more difficult for international visitors.

The Nassar family have owned and farmed this land since 1916, but in 1991 Israel declared it to be "state land". In 2007 the Israeli Supreme Court told the family they could begin the process of re-registration, but ever since then the legal process has been subject to repeated delays and cancellations of court hearings.

We call upon the Conference to:

1. Send a message of support for the Tent of Nations in its Christian stand for peace and justice in the midst of increasing difficulties
2. Urge the Israeli government and the Israeli Supreme Court to allow the hearing of the re-registration case to proceed without further delay

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3. Urge the British Government to support by all means possible the access of Daoud Nassar and his family to due legal process.

Reply

The Conference welcomes the invitation of the Sheffield Circuit to offer an expression of solidarity with the Nassar family. Daoud Nassar and family have been welcoming hosts to countless visitors to Palestine and are tireless witnesses to Palestinian steadfastness in the face of adversity. The Methodist Conference is alarmed at the significantly increased dispossession of Palestinian land and houses in the West Bank over the past year, noting that in recent month's violent settler groups have attacked Palestinian communities while IDF forces have stood by and watched.

In accepting the memorial the Conference affirms its prayerful solidarity with the Nassar family. The Conference welcomes representations made to the Embassy of Israel and the British Government by the Secretary of Conference in April 2024. The Conference requests that any further communication draws attention to the appeal of the Sheffield Circuit and the reply of the Conference. The Conference also expresses appreciation for the international Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem and its work in facilitating relationships and encounter between Palestinians, Israelis and Methodist people worldwide.

M7 Nassar Family and Israel/ Palestine

The Burnley and Pendle Circuit Meeting (21/1) (Present: 38 voting: unanimous) notes that in 2017 the Nassar family were awarded the World Methodist Peace Award. The Tent of Nations is their family farm south of Bethlehem surrounded by five Illegal Israeli Settlements and is under threat of being 'grabbed' to complete settlement building in the area.

The family have endured attacks on their land and crops as well as physical violence that has left members of the family hospitalised. Despite having land registration documents in the family name for over hundred years the family are involved in a lengthy and expensive court process over 30. This court process is now requiring them to re-register the land.

Despite all they have faced the family have made a conscious decision to remain true to their Christian faith and have chosen a path of non-violent resistance to the intimidation and violence. Their choice is to 'refuse to be enemies'.

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The Burnley and Pendle Circuit urges the Conference to stand in solidarity with the Nassar family as they seek to live out their Christian faith in non-violent residence to the oppression of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and in particular the threat to their family's land.

- a) To write a letter of support to the Nassar family from the Methodist Church in Britain assuring them of our prayerful support and solidarity in their peaceful stand against the threats they continue to face,
- b) To write to the Israeli Embassy in the UK stating our awareness of the situation, our continued support for the Nassar family, and requesting that the process to re-register their land is completed quickly.

The Burnley and Pendle Circuit further calls on the Methodist Church to continue to highlight the peace work of the Nassar family through its communications.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Burnley and Pendle Circuit for its memorial and adopts the same reply as M6.

M8 Responding to the Conflict in Gaza

The South Worcestershire Circuit Meeting (Present: 29 voting: in favour 28, against 1) is appalled at the shocking and brutal attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 in Israel, noting also the UN Secretary General's observation that this did not happen in a vacuum, and the subsequent ruthless and deeply destructive attacks by Israel on the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank. This has resulted in a collective punishment in which tens of thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands made homeless.

Recognising the depth of the historical oppression of the Palestinian people, the South Worcestershire Circuit requests the Conference to encourage the Methodist people to endorse and fulfil the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against all Israeli products, as a non-violent strategy until Israel recognises a Palestinian state.

It also urges the Conference to call on the British Government to

- a) itself recognise Palestine as a state, believing this offers the best long-term security for Israel itself;
- b) cease all sales of arms and related products to Israel until it recognises the state of Palestine.

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It further calls on Barclays Bank and HSBC to withdraw from all loans and investments in relation to the state of Israel, Israeli banks, and companies which are engaged in developing settlements on Palestinian land (in contravention of international law), and encourages all Methodist churches and investment bodies who have accounts or investments in these two banks to vigorously convey to them this message.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South Worcestershire Circuit for its memorial and draws attention to the statements made by the President and Vice-President since 7 October 2023, including joint statements made with ecumenical colleagues.

The Conference recalls its reply to memorials in 2017 regarding the Balfour Declaration stating that a recognition and reassessment of values that guided foreign policy in relation to Palestine during the colonial era is vital, not only for the UK's influence in helping to build a just peace in Israel/Palestine today, but also to support strong community relations in our ethnically diverse British society. Recognising that calls for recognition of Palestinian statehood arise from the appropriate and just pursuit of Palestinian self-determination, the Conference calls on the UK Government to recognise the State of Palestine.

The Conference calls on the UK Government to cease all arms sales to Israel, to remain vigilant regarding the embargo on arms to nations that might support Hamas and to honour the UK's obligations under the international Arms Trade Treaty to the full.

The Conference welcomes the continuing engagement with HSBC and Barclays across a range of issues and is grateful for the oversight provided by the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) including in the drafting of a Banking policy and a revised Conflict and Human Rights policy and asks JACEI to continue to report on issues and engagement in relation to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Conference also notes its previous replies in relation to the BDS campaign, draws the attention of the Connexion to the resources that have been produced and commends further study of these matters.

www.methodist.org.uk/ConferencePositionOnIsraelPalestine

www.methodist.org.uk/faith/prayer/israel-palestine/statements-and-briefings/

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M9 Israel and Gaza

The East Anglia District Synod (Present: 73 voting: 66 for, 7 against) deplores both the actions of Hamas on 7 October and beyond, including the taking and holding of hostages, and the ongoing response of the Israel Defence Force.

All this has brought death, destruction, displacement and now famine to the people of the region and especially Gaza.

We request that the Conference adds its voice to those urging all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and those requesting that the UK cease all arms supplies to the region. We further ask the Conference to encourage all Methodist people to pray for justice and peace in the region.

Reply

The Conference thanks the East Anglia District for its memorial and welcomes statements made by the President and Vice-President of the Conference including their public communication on 24 February and their joint statement with 140 Christian leaders facilitated by Church for Middle East Peace on 24 March and their correspondence with Ministers in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in this respect. (A list of Methodist Church statements can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/faith/prayer/israel-palestine/statements-and-briefings/). In accepting the memorial the Conference encourages Methodist people to pray for peace and justice, and with respect to arms sales, draws attention to its reply to M8.

M10 Methodist Conference and Specialist Defence and Security Convention UK

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod (Present: 73; Voting: 62 for, 1 against) conscious that the Methodist Conference will assemble in 2025 and 2026 at the Telford International Centre, brings to the attention of the Conference the Specialist Defence and Security Convention UK (SDSC-UK) that also takes place at that venue. This major defence and security exhibition hosts arms companies with an active interest in the development of weaponised unmanned aviation vehicles (military robots) and laser weapons. The exhibition also enables companies to market surveillance equipment that is being sold to countries that are governed by autocratic regimes. The District requests that the Conference explores whether it is possible to use an alternative venue as a protest to the SDSC-UK using the Telford International Centre and in any case requests that the Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to write to the venue expressing these concerns in view of our position as one of their customers, and forwarding a copy of this memorial and the reply.

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The District further expresses grave concern over the development of weaponised unmanned aerial vehicles and other lethal autonomous weapons systems that are capable of independently identifying and eliminating targets. We ask the Conference to write to the UK government to urge support for new multilateral negotiations to regulate lethal autonomous weapons systems. Several UN member states, human rights organisations and faith groups are calling for such negotiations to take place outside of the forum of the Convention on Conventional Weapons where discussion has become deadlocked as every state has an effective veto.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod and recognises the concerns expressed.

The Telford International Centre (TIC) worked well as a venue for the Conference in 2022. In the light of a decreasing number of venues suitable and significant increases in venue costs, the Conference Planning Executive (CPE) were pleased to enter a three year contract with the TIC which will host the Conferences of 2025-2027. The CPE does not ask for a list from potential venues as to who their other customers might be, for legal and commercial reasons they are unlikely to share that information. Given that there is no alternative venue for 2025, it is not possible to cancel that contract at this point. Were it possible, such action would cost the Methodist Church financially but would have minimum impact on the TIC and almost certainly no impact on the SDSC-UK. It would also require a new venue to be found and there is no guarantee that other such venues will not have customers based in the arms trade or other sectors that the Conference recognises as problematic.

The increasing levels of autonomy in remotely operated weaponry and further substantial investments by governments in this area, accelerated by the advances in Artificial Intelligence, are a grave concern. The Conference recalls the 2012 Conference Report "Drones: Ethical Dilemmas in the Application of Military Force" and resolution 2012/16.4 on the need for arms control to counter the threat posed by the development of systems capable of autonomous targeting and weapons delivery. The Conference welcomes the call of the UN Secretary General and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for establishment of new prohibitions and restrictions in international law to be concluded by 2026, negotiated in a forum mandated by the General Assembly that includes all stakeholders and that cannot be blocked by the vested interests of a few. The Conference recalls the view expressed in the 2012 Conference report that the autonomous operation of weapons systems without direct human control is a red line that should not be crossed. The Conference welcomes the statement of the UN Secretary General in 2023 that such systems are politically unacceptable and morally repugnant and the continuing work of the Joint Public Issues Team on the future of

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arms in conjunction with ecumenical and international partners. The Conference therefore accepts the memorial in part in that it directs a letter to be sent to His Majesty's Government, as set out in the memorial above.

M11 Report of the Independent Commission

The Birmingham District Synod (present: 115 voting: in favour 106, against 0) requests that the Conference warmly welcomes the Report of the Independent Commission for Integration of Refugees, launched in March this year. The District also asks the Conference to encourage Methodists actively to engage with the report, and urge the Government to study and act on the report's far-sighted recommendations.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham District for its memorial, and for drawing attention to the report of the Commission on the Integration of Refugees. This offers a cohesive and detailed set of costed proposals for an improved approach to welcoming and settling new arrivals in the UK, backed by strong evidence and wide consultation.

The Methodist Church has already endorsed or called for a number of the policies it recommends, including permitting those seeking asylum to work while their claims are assessed, limiting the use of detention, and extending the notice period people are given to move on from their accommodation after being granted leave to remain in the UK.

Implementing the report's proposals would offer refugees far greater dignity, respect and agency than current approaches, and the Conference agrees that the report should be welcomed, studied, advocated for, and acted upon.

In supporting material sent to the Memorials Committee and available to members of the Conference on request, the Synod suggests that the report could be used as the basis for the Church's 'policy asks' of the government around seeking justice for refugees. The Conference notes that the report has a particular focus on refugee integration, and therefore does not address many of the more contentious questions around asylum and migration policy which have been the subject of political debate and legislation in the UK in recent years. These include such issues as the plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, how to deal with people-smuggling and tragic loss of lives in the English Channel, 'hostile environment' policies, the need for new safe and legal routes for people to seek asylum in the UK, and how the UK interprets its responsibilities towards refugees under international law and the European Convention on Human Rights. Nor does the report look at how the global causes of forced migration and displacement might be tackled. The Methodist Church has been a vocal advocate for justice and a more compassionate approach on many of these

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issues, and the Justice-seeking Church report adopted by the Conference in 2023 sets out a range of ways in which Methodists are already engaged in pursuing justice for refugees, and could develop that engagement further. The Conference therefore makes clear that it does not believe that the policy work of the Church around justice for refugees should be limited to advocating for the recommendations of the Commission on the Integration of Refugees.

The Conference therefore also adds its endorsement to the 'Fair Begins Here' campaign from the Together with Refugees coalition (www.togetherwithrefugees.org.uk), of which the Methodist Church has been a member since its launch in 2021. This is calling for a fair new plan for refugees that:

- Ensures protection for people fleeing war and persecution by upholding the UK's commitment under international law to the right to claim asylum and by scrapping the Rwanda scheme.
- Provides a proper strategy for welcoming and integrating refugees by ensuring fair, rapid decisions on their application for asylum, and the chance to rebuild their lives through settling in a community, being allowed to work and the chance to learn English.
- Forges stronger global cooperation to tackle the root causes that force people to flee their homes and provides positive solutions when they do, including through safe routes to refugee protection.

In the context of the current General Election campaign, the Conference also points to the election briefing from the Joint Public Issues Team on asylum and refugee issues, which summarises key concerns and suggests questions which could be raised with parliamentary candidates.

The Conference accepts the memorial.

M12 Mission Partner Programme

The Bolton and Rochdale District Synod (Present: 47; Voting: 44 for, 0 against) requests the Conference to direct the Global Relationships Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee to provide a full explanation of the rationale by which the Ordained Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be continued and the Lay Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be closed.

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This should include amongst other relevant factors and documents:

1. The mission theology which was used to make this distinction;
2. A copy of the advisory mission-theological paper, which was submitted to the committee to help make this decision;
3. An identification of the 'place' in the financial decision making process where the action was taken to set aside reserves for the continuation of the Ordained Mission Partner Programme but not to set aside reserves for the continuance of the Lay Mission Partner Programme;
4. Whether that decision making 'place' was a committee, an executive individual or some other body;
5. The financial projections of reserves and future programme costs, which was used for the decision;
6. Any other relevant material.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bolton and Rochdale District Synod for this memorial and gives thanks that God has not stopped calling people, both lay and ordained, to mission and ministry in every corner of the world. However recognising the in depth theological, structural, and participative work already undertaken by the Global Relationships Committee (GRC) and the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), the Mission Committee, the Council and the debate at last year's Conference in this area, it declines the memorial.

The GRC had to wrestle with what a much-reduced World Mission Fund (WMF) should be used for in future. It did so in the context of unpacking the nature of global partnership in the Gospel. The main uses of the WMF at the time were grants to partner churches covering a Nationals-in-Mission programme, scholarships for leadership training, annual support to poorer churches, and grants given to partner churches in response to emergencies, and to the sending of Mission Partners. The Mission Partner Programme was both ordained and lay. All this spending could no longer all be afforded from the reduced level of income. The budget for all work has needed to be cut. This has resulted in reducing what we will give our Partners in grants by around 90%, and a cut to the Mission Partner budget of at least 50%.

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The missional thinking behind cutting less of the Mission partner budget than the grants budget was set out in a confidential paper presented to the Global Relationships Committee in December 2022 and includes the following: *'...Mission Partners generate interest in the global Church and our Partners. This programme is a sign of solidarity, incarnational mission, and a commitment to learn from and be accountable to our Partners...Many who return having served as Mission Partners do so with enhanced skills and new perspectives that are of service in our context.'*

The new financial realities mean that MCB can now only afford to send less than half of its current number of Mission Partners.

The decision then had to be made on how most effectively to use the reduced Mission Partner portion of the budget. After much prayerful consideration and having reflected theologically and examined a range of option, the Global Relationships Committee decided with great sadness to recommend ending the employment of lay Mission Partners. It did this in consultation with the Methodist Church in Ireland with who our overseas work is undertaken in partnership.

The thought, reflection and consideration given were extensive. Just two points are made here;

First, whilst ordained personnel from overseas can enter the MCB via the Ministers of other Churches and Conferences (MOCC) programme, lay folks cannot. Second, whilst ordained Mission Partners and employed Mission Partners receive the same stipends and benefits, there have been costs and risks incurred on the WMF for employees that, in a future programme for only ordained Mission Partners, would no longer be applicable. These costs and risks have been uncertain and large, creating an unsustainably high risk in budget-management.

The Conference recognises and applauds the GRC in its commitment to explore vocational and missional opportunities for all those in the life of the MCB in partnership with its overseas partner churches. The Conference gives thanks for all those who continue to work to increase the giving into the WMF, paying especial tribute to the work of Methodist Women in Britain.

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M13 Mission Partners

The Yorkshire North and East District Synod (Present: 99 voting: in favour 94, against 3) requests the Methodist Conference to direct the Global Relationships Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee to provide a full explanation of the rationale by which the Ordained Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be continued and the Lay Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be closed and a report on the exploration of pathways and partnerships by which Methodist lay people may exercise this calling into the future.

This should include amongst other relevant factors and documents:

1. The mission theology which was used to make this distinction;
2. A copy of the advisory mission-theological paper, which was submitted to the committee to help make this decision;
3. An identification of the 'place' in the financial decision making process where the action was taken to set aside reserves for the continuation of the Ordained Mission Partner Programme but not to set aside reserves for the continuance of the Lay Mission Partner Programme;
4. Whether that decision making 'place' was a committee, an executive individual or some other body;
5. The financial projections of reserves and future programme costs, which was used for the decision;
6. Any other relevant material.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yorkshire North and East District Synod for the memorial and adopts the same reply as M12.

M14 Connexional Financial Support

The Peterborough Circuit Meeting (23/21) (present: 27 voting: in favour 24, against 0) calls on the Conference to commission a review of how the Connexional Principle (mutual support, and the stronger enabling the weak) is being upheld across our Church, particularly in relation to finance, and how we help poorer Circuits and Local Churches through periods of transition towards growth.

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Our concern is that poverty in Circuits is recognised not only in terms of the finance held, but also the financial insecurities around the repurposing or sale of assets, and cash flow. Confidence in the latter is crucial to giving churches and Circuits the capacity to rethink the scope and focus of their mission. This challenge is intensified by our need to focus earlier rather than later on discerning the support that must be in place to help nurture people through change. Meanwhile, the costs of ministry and church upkeep are increasing.

We celebrate how connexional funding is being released to meet the priorities of God for All. We acknowledge that Districts set their own policies for grant giving. However, it may be prudent for the Methodist Church to investigate further and examine how a range of measures such as providing temporary relief towards staffing costs, bridging funding, offering loans as opposed to grants, are being deployed from our investments and reserves.

We would urge that the Methodist Church does all it can to provide Circuits with the security that they need to consolidate into affordable, vibrant, sustainable entities.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Peterborough Circuit for its Memorial.

Considerable work is already undertaken to ensure that Connexional Funds are deployed in the most appropriate way to support Our Calling as a growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking Church.

It may assist the Circuit to know that in the Connexional Central Services Budget (CCSB) approved by the Conference in 2023 it was agreed that the District Assessment would be cut in real terms by 3% every year for five years. Whilst a necessary response to the financial pressures that local trustees are facing, this 15% cut will reduce the work that can be delivered connexionally. In relation to the reserves policy, the 2023 Conference approved a reduction in the planned reserve level from £7.5m to a range of £6m - £5m. This change has freed up funds for the mission and is in line with the financial strategy of the Church.

Many parts of the Connexion are facing financial challenges due to the numerical decline in membership, exacerbated by external factors such as the impact of the pandemic and wider economic issues. Despite these challenges, allocations to the District Advance Funds have increased from £5.2m in 2020 to £9.1m in 2023. However, there simply are not the funds at the connexional level to be able to subsidise ministry at the local level through temporary grants or loans as requested. The limited reserves are already allocated. Furthermore, it is estimated that there is approximately £300m sitting in the funds of Local Churches, Circuits and Districts. Even allowing for the fact

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that some of this money sits in restricted funds, and other amounts are appropriately held as reserves, it is still estimated there is between £100m and £150m available for supporting the day to day operations of the Church. This money is unevenly distributed across the Connexion and is under the control of local trustees; however, it should be the source of funding to allow churches and Circuits to reorder themselves to become the affordable, vibrant, sustainable entities envisaged by the memorial.

The Conference fully supports the aspiration that the mission and ministry is supported in those places where it is most needed, and that Circuits and churches receive support when necessary, where possible through local redeployment of available resources. As its reply to the memorial, the Conference draws the attention of the Peterborough Circuit to the work proposed on economic justice in the life of the Church, which is contained within the report of the Methodist Council. The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference.

M15 Connexionalism and Expense Costs

The Angus, Dundee and Perthshire Circuit Meeting (31/11) (Present: 19 Voting: unanimous) notes that connexionalism is a central part of our being as Methodists and gathering for whatever purpose (training, retreats etc) is valued and welcomed. This is undermined when people are invited to connexionally organised events and then Circuits are asked to cover the travel expenses. Circuits that are more geographically distant from where the events are being held will naturally have to pay more, and this, at a time when it is already harder to station ministers in such locations. This puts another burden on these Circuits and potentially increases isolation thereby undermining connexion. Any events (conferences, training, retreats etc) that are organised connexionally should be funded connexionally including travel expenses. If the connexional budget is lacking in this regard a small levy on all Circuits could be added to the existing arrangements. This will ensure the costs are born equally across the Connexion and would reaffirm our connectedness. As such the Conference directs the connexional treasurer to liaise with the District Treasurers to implement this.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Angus, Dundee and Perthshire Circuit Meeting for this memorial and for highlighting how central 'Connexionalism' is to the Methodist Church.

There are many costs that are borne at a local church and circuit level that do not fall evenly across the Connexion. Such differences may reflect differences between rural and urban settings, the age of congregations, the impact of poverty, or, as in this case, geographic distance. Similarly, the ability to pay, or wealth of our Connexion is not evenly distributed, and also reflects a range of factors. The complexity of these issues is beyond the scope of our processes to deal with. Therefore, rather than centralise

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all costs, the Church has generally adopted a pragmatic approach to what is funded locally and what is funded Connexionally. However, in recent years, the Church has clearly asked that the burden of the Methodist Church Fund Assessment is reduced, meaning there is less money available to fund things at a connexional level. Introducing a new connexional levy to fund event travel expenses would run counter to this approach.

However, there is a long history across the Connexion of 'those that have' helping 'those that haven't'. If a Circuit is unable to fund these costs it should be encouraged to seek support from neighbouring Circuits who are more fortunate, and/or to seek support from their District. If such efforts are not successful, then an approach to the organiser of the event would be appropriate.

Therefore, the Conference declines the memorial.

M16 Ministers' housing allowance

The Southport Circuit Meeting (18/17) (Present: 30 Voting: in favour 29, against 0) is aware that there is a significant number of ministers of other churches/denominations who are 'authorised to serve' the Methodist Church.'

The Southport Circuit requests that the Conference considers agreeing to payment of Accommodation Allowances to **Authorised Ministers** from other denominations who request to live in their own homes. We ask the Conference to permit the payment by Circuit Meetings.

The current position places ministers who have good reason for such a request at a major financial disadvantage. For example, in some cases the minister may have lived in his/her own home for a considerable number of years and chosen to do this. This is the case of one of our Authorised Ministers where the Liverpool Diocese has previously paid an accommodation allowance.

It is appreciated that a manse can often be made available if the authorised minister is not already living in the house provided with their primary role. However, the latter is not always the case so the Authorised Minister may be expected to move. However, the initial period of invitation can make moving into a manse costly and relatively inconvenient. In addition, the Conference only authorises people to serve the Methodist Church, 'during the ensuing connexional year'.

The Southport Circuit suggests that, since the minister remains under the discipline of their denomination, allowances should be modelled on the arrangements currently in place or currently agreed for any particular ministers of these respective

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denominations and also with the agreement of the appropriate authority in their own church/denomination.

The Southport Circuit requests that the Conference requests the Connexional Allowances Committee to consider the matter and also consider the documents provided with this memorial (available on request) which show the relative position of the Church of England, United Reformed Church and The Baptist Union.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Southport Circuit Meeting for this memorial.

The work of the Connexional Allowances Committee will, subject to decisions of this Conference, become the responsibility of the Resourcing Committee as of September 2024. The Conference refers the question raised by the memorial to the Resourcing Committee for consideration, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, and requests a report back to the Conference of 2025.

M17 Prolonged Ministerial Suspension

The South Worcestershire Circuit Meeting (5/16) (present: 29 voting: unanimously) is deeply concerned at the length of time it is taking to resolve ministerial suspensions. For example in one circuit, the Superintendent has been suspended for over two years (since January 2022) and the process is still unresolved. This is a wholly unacceptable situation for the minister concerned and churches involved; it puts a great strain on the suspended minister and on the other circuit staff and lay volunteers.

In this instance, the church where the Superintendent has oversight is continuing to pay its full assessment during this period without for various reasons, receiving the continuous ministerial oversight which it has a right to expect. The Circuit had to bear the full cost of the stipend for 20 months until the Connexion agreed to take on the ongoing costs. It should be possible to reimburse Circuits more quickly, so that alternatives could be examined, such as employment of supernumeraries or suitably qualified lay pastors.

It appears that the Church's Complaints and Discipline process is clearly unfit for purpose. We have been told that a report reviewing the Disciplinary processes was due to be brought to the Conference 2023 but this did not happen. The Circuit urges the Conference to urgently review the disciplinary process. It also wishes to know if there is a regular report of the numbers of complaints in process and how long they are taking.

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Reply

The Conference thanks the South Worcestershire Circuit for this memorial and recognises the challenges faced by the Circuit over such a long period of time.

The matter of who is responsible for costs in the case of the suspension of a minister is covered under Standing Orders 013(11) and 1105(10). In both cases the Standing Orders make it clear that a discretionary payment from the Methodist Church Fund can be applied for under Standing Order 365(7)(i).

The Church's Complaints and Discipline process has undergone a thorough review and the recommendations of that work are contained in the Part 11 Review report which is before this Conference. The Conference also notes its reply to Memorials 15 and 16 in 2023 and the revisions to the Standing Orders that are contained in the report of the Methodist Council to the Conference and therefore believes that the reply to this memorial is contained within the resolutions of the Conference.

M18 Ministerial Stress

The Plymouth and Exeter District (Present: 61, voting 57 for, 1 against) is concerned about the personal, resource, and mission costs implied in the number of those involved in all forms of ministry who are stepping back from the active work prior to the national age of retirement, or seeking time off due to stress and not returning; at a time when there are insufficient ordained ministers to fill all stationing vacancies, and churches are finding it difficult to recruit the staff they need.

Aware that the underlying cause of physical and mental ill health can be work-related stress or trauma, and having identified common issues of concern, the Synod requests that the Conference:

Establish a working party to research further into Ministerial Stress, to include hearing the voices of people who have experience of early retirement and extended ill health leave.

To research:

- a. Structural factors which lead to unhealthy working practices, stress-related leave, ill health, early retirement, and resignation, to reveal ways to facilitate more effective wellbeing.
- b. The impact which addressing underlying causes could have by improving wellbeing throughout the Church, and thereby its mission effectiveness.

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- c. Areas of Church life where ministers (of any form) can feel powerless, voiceless, or disrespected, and how this might be addressed before stress develops into serious issues.
- d. Causes of 'toxic cultures' and how these might be addressed.
- e. Ways in which the administrative burden of Church life could be reduced.
- f. Any associated training needs.

COST IMPLICATIONS

- It is expected these would be minimal, and would evolve as the work progresses.
- Savings associated with the increased effectiveness of the ministry of the whole church far outweigh any costs – see benefits listed below.

Reply

The Conference warmly thanks the Plymouth and Exeter District for the memorial, for its reminder of the central importance of ministerial flourishing within the life of the Church, and for drawing attention to concerns around ministerial stress, as well as identifying a number of potential causes. The Conference recognises and acknowledges the personal, resource and mission costs of ministerial stress which the memorial notes.

In 2022 the Conference adopted a report designed to enable reflection on the covenant relationship between the members, officers, institutions, committees and Conference of the Methodist Church on the one hand, and its ministers, both presbyters and deacons, on the other. It directed that this be published under the title *Renewing Full Connexion: Commitments and Expectations* as Part 6 of Book IV of The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church. The Connexional Team has also identified ministerial wellbeing as an important and vital area on which to focus and in March a meeting drew together representatives from the Connexion to look, in detail, at the issues of recuperative years, research into ministerial wellbeing which has previously been undertaken, and continues to be funded by the Methodist Church (as well as that currently being undertaken by the Church of England) and evidence gathered from across the Connexion about causes of poor ministerial wellbeing.

It is planned that this work now be quickly taken forward, ensuring that voices and experiences from across the Connexion are heard and feed into the development of the Methodist Church's support and resourcing for ministerial flourishing and wellbeing.

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The Connexional Team recognises the need to prioritise this area of church life and thus has recently appointed a Wellbeing Project Officer, in addition to the two Wellbeing Advisers in the Connexional Team. In addition, a new Ministry Development Officer post, focusing on ministerial and vocational flourishing is planned, with the remit to advance and implement the support and resourcing for ministerial wellbeing and flourishing.

The Conference therefore declines the specific request made in the memorial on the basis that there are already plans in place carefully to consider and work towards addressing the issues raised, and to resource this area of Church life. Nonetheless, the Conference wishes very strongly to affirm and acknowledge the critical importance of ministerial wellbeing and flourishing and the need to take active steps to support this.

M19 Mandatory Training Requirements

The Chester-le-Street Circuit Meeting (20/20) (Present: 20 Voting: in favour 16, against 0) draws the Conference's attention to mandatory training requirements, specifically EDI and Advanced Safeguarding.

We greatly value the training opportunities provided by the Methodist Church and we are very grateful to be part of a church that values these issues and takes them seriously. We work hard to ensure that our members complete their training easily and quickly.

We are very aware however that the length of the Advanced Safeguarding Training and the EDI training are proving a challenge both for older members and particularly for those who work full time and have families. Whilst the content of these courses is excellent, we feel we must highlight the need for some different forms of training. These might include more gathered online opportunities or a series of short in person sessions that could be accessed at any time.

In addition, the update of the Advanced Safeguarding Training is vital but covers the entire original training. A shorter refresher course could ease the burden and focus attention on the most up to date aspects of the training.

We are fully committed to encouraging all of our members to engage with their training needs and remain up to date and we urge the Conference to review these matters.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Chester-le-Street Circuit Meeting for highlighting the importance of mandatory training requirements, specifically EDI mandatory training and Advanced Safeguarding, and the need for a variety of delivery formats. We are

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grateful for the support and encouragement that is given to the importance and significance of such training in the church.

The feedback that is received through those delivering both the Foundation and Advanced Safeguarding modules is overwhelmingly positive and we are often approached with requests to add more detail or specific items within the training. Consequently, when both courses are being updated and refreshed there is always a careful process that the training working group adopts in order to test out what is included. This is then approved by the Safeguarding Committee and sent to the Methodist Council for adoption.

Discussions about frequency of renewing training are regularly reviewed as four years is now considered by many organisations to be too long a gap but the Methodist Church currently feels that once every four years is sufficient for its purposes. Training is now supported in person and online so that there is a greater range of ways in which to complete it. We have also been supplementing the core training with a series of webinars which cover other aspects of safeguarding concerns and will continue to add to this programme. For most people, training in this area is considered not to be onerous given the significance of the subject as the church develops its understanding of the theology of safeguarding and the demands in the wider world increase.

Nevertheless the Safeguarding Team will seek views of those who lead the Advanced Training (District Safeguarding Officers and members of the Learning Network) to see if it is feasible to enable the course to be spread across two or three shorter online sessions.

In regard to mandatory EDI training and opportunities for gathered in person or online sessions, the Connexional Team have previously responded to similar requests and made available additional resources that would enable Circuits to engage with the training in person or online in groups. It is important to note that both formats can be delivered over a number of sessions. Colleagues from the Learning Network would be available to help plan such sessions.

Please follow the link below for more details:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/the-inclusive-methodist-church/training-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity/mandatory-edi-training-equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

In declining the specific requests made in the memorial, the Conference notes that the accessibility of the training material is already being addressed, through the work that the Connexional Team has undertaken in providing the additional materials and that the

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material allows flexible approaches in engagement. The Conference encourages the Circuit to work with those delivering training to explore the options that are available.

M20 Mandatory Training Requirements

The East Durham Circuit Meeting and Local Preachers/Worship Leaders Meeting (20/19) (Present: 23, voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to mandatory training requirements, specifically EDI and Advanced Safeguarding.

We greatly value the training opportunities provided by the Methodist Church and are pleased to be part of a church that takes equality and safeguarding so seriously.

We are also fully committed to ensuring that all of our volunteers complete their training as quickly as possible and remain up to date. Having said this, it has become clear to us that the length of the advanced safeguarding module (8 hours plus) is proving very difficult for those who work full time. Similarly, the all-day EDI session, whilst extremely valuable, posed a similar problem for those who work full time as well as some of our older members.

We are keen to harness the enthusiasm and commitment of our members to their various ministries and callings but would urge the conference to review the length and renewal frequency of these courses to enable this to happen.

Reply

The Conference thanks the East Durham Circuit Meeting and adopts the same reply as M19.

M21 Modified Constitutions

The Birmingham District Synod (Present: 115; Voting: 111 for, 0 against) has begun to implement the recommendations of the Oversight and Trusteeship Reports and the God for All Strategy. In doing so, across the District, we have a number of different expressions of church oversight emerging and a number of New Places for New People beginning. In these places we are seeing growth in mission and discipleship.

Those involved with leading 'traditional' churches exploring different oversight arrangements, for example multisite churches, and those pioneering New Places for New People, are finding that the constitutional requirements for Local Churches in Part 6 of Standing Orders, in particular the Constitution of the Church Council in SO 610, unhelpful for a variety of reasons. In particular the offices required in SO 610(1) not reflecting the expression of church that is emerging and the desire for smaller governance bodies to release people for mission and discipleship.

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The Synod is aware that under Section 48A of Standing Orders, there is provision for Districts with Modified Constitutions, and similarly under Section 58 provision for Circuits with Modified Constitutions.

The Synod therefore asks the Conference to direct the appropriate committee to consider a policy for Local Churches with Modified Constitutions following the precedent already set for Districts and Circuits, and for that committee to work with the Law and Polity Committee to draft the relevant Standing Orders. The Synod believes such provision would enable more flexible and effective oversight and managing trusteeship for Local Churches, particularly New Places for New People, as the Oversight and Trusteeship report envisaged. In terms of New Places for New People, provision would need to be made for a Local Church's first constitution to be a modified one. For existing churches, provision would need to be made for modification of their existing constitution under Standing Order 610.

The Synod hopes the provisions in the Standing Orders would allow for maximum flexibility, with model constitutions being available on the Methodist Church website for both 'traditional' churches and New Places for New People. The Synod recognises modified constitutions would need to be approved and noting the comments in MC/24/15, suggests these could be approved by the District Policy Committee on the advice of the District Chair and Synod Secretary.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham District Synod for its Memorial and affirms the work being undertaken in the District to implement the connexional Oversight and Trusteeship and God for All strategies. The Conference is pleased to note the early signs of growth in response, and recognises the need to ensure that the underpinning and enabling governance to support such initiatives needs to be appropriate, proportionate and flexible, whilst still ensuring that all activity is safe and fulfils the Methodist Church's obligations under Charity Law.

The Conference notes, in respect of the Local Church, that the Oversight and Trusteeship Report to the 2021 Conference (see section 8, especially 8.7, at pages 426-440) recommended that trusteeship for Local Church activity should generally remain with the Church Council. At the same time it also recognised that there were practical options for exercising governance in creative and flexible ways, including through multi-site single church arrangements and the use of an expanded power of delegation. Such options have been accepted by the Conference and embodied in CPD. They may therefore already provide solutions for some situations, which the Conference would commend for continued consideration. Nonetheless, given the varied examples of fresh expression, pioneering or other forms of church that

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are emerging at this time, it could be that other methods or provisions would further enhance the possibilities of appropriate governance for such projects, schemes or emerging forms of church. This may include developing provisions for modified local church constitutions, in parallel with similar provisions for modified circuit and district constitutions; or, instead or additionally, through other possible means.

Accordingly, the Conference accepts the spirit of the memorial and directs that the present possible governance arrangements for emerging forms of church be reviewed, and if appropriate new forms of governance be adapted or developed within the existing governance framework within CPD, to enable effect to be given to connexional policy and to enable emerging mission opportunities to be responded to and supported effectively. As part of this, the Conference directs that consideration be given to the development of provisions for modified local church constitutions. Such consideration should include the question by which body and on whose advice such modified constitutions might be approved, noting that in order to ensure connexional consistency the role of the Secretary of the Conference has been retained in the proposed adjustments elsewhere in the 2024 Conference Agenda to the provisions for Districts and Circuits with Modified Constitutions. The Conference recognises that consideration will need to be given to the potential virtues, or difficulties, of any existing or proposed options, and to establish the potential benefits and appropriateness, or otherwise, of different options, so that an appropriate suite of options can be developed, understood, and used well.

The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to undertake this work and to report no later than to the Conference of 2026, consulting with relevant members of the Connexional Team and with the Mission and Faith and Order Committees, and taking into account practical concerns such as those referred to in the memorial.

M22 Modified Constitutions

The Yorkshire West Synod (Present: 130; Voting: 128 for, 2 against) has begun to implement the recommendations of the Oversight and Trusteeship Reports and the God for All Strategy. In doing so, across the District, we have a number of different expressions of church oversight emerging and a number of New Places for New People beginning. In these places we are seeing growth in mission and discipleship.

Those involved with leading 'traditional' churches exploring different oversight arrangements, for example multisite churches, and those pioneering New Places for New People, are finding that the constitutional requirements for Local Churches in Part 6 of Standing Orders, in particular the Constitution of the Church Council in SO 610, unhelpful for a variety of reasons. In particular the offices required in SO 610(1)

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not reflecting the expression of church that is emerging and the desire for smaller governance bodies to release people for mission and discipleship.

The Synod is aware that under Section 48A of Standing Orders, there is provision for Districts with Modified Constitutions, and similarly under Section 58 provision for Circuits with Modified Constitutions.

The Synod therefore asks the Conference to direct the appropriate committee to consider a policy for Local Churches with Modified Constitutions following the precedent already set for Districts and Circuits, and for that committee to work with the Law and Polity Committee to draft the relevant Standing Orders. The Synod believes such provision would enable more flexible and effective oversight and managing trusteeship for Local Churches, particularly New Places for New People, as the Oversight and Trusteeship report envisaged. In terms of New Places for New People, provision would need to be made for a Local Church's first constitution to be a modified one. For existing churches, provision would need to be made for modification of their existing constitution under Standing Order 610.

The Synod hopes the provisions in the Standing Orders would allow for maximum flexibility, with model constitutions being available on the Methodist Church website for both 'traditional' churches and New Places for New People. The Synod recognises modified constitutions would need to be approved and noting the comments in MC/24/15, suggests these could be approved by the District Policy Committee on the advice of the District Chair and Synod Secretary.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yorkshire West District Synod for its Memorial and adopts the same reply as for M21.