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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2021 Methodist Conference

The 2021 Methodist Conference, held in Birmingham and online: Presbyteral Session 24-25 June; Representative Session 26 June – 1 July.

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Election and Induction of the President and Vice-President

On Saturday 26 June the Revd Sonia Hicks was elected and inducted as President of the Conference and Barbara Easton as Vice-President. In her Conference address Mrs Hicks focused on her theme for the year, “God’s Table: An Invitation for All”, reflecting on the racism and marginalisation she and her family have experienced and how the Church can respond to injustice and division in society today. The Vice-President, Barbara Easton, drew on her experience as a quilter to address the Conference on a range of issues including on diversity, the environment and ecumenical relations.

You can read the President’s address in full here: **The President’s Address to the Methodist Conference 2021**

You can read the Vice-President’s address in full here: **The Vice-President’s Address to the Methodist Conference 2021**

Reception into Full Connexion

During Conference worship, 22 presbyters and three deacons were received into Full Connexion on Sunday 27 June, along with four presbyters by transfer and one presbyter by reinstatement. Later that day, ordination services took place in five churches in the vicinity of Birmingham. The Conference rejoiced that those ordinands who had been received into Full Connexion

online at the 2020 Conference were ordained in six venues across the Connexion on the preceding weekend.

Education strategy

The Revd Dr Roger Walton introduced the report, ‘Transforming Lives: A Schools’ Educational Strategy for the Methodist Church’, which outlines the strategy for Methodist schools for the next ten years.

The Conference:

- Affirmed those who work and volunteer to support education;
- Urged Circuits to audit local schools regularly as part of their mission;
- Encouraged Districts to appoint District Education Officers;
- Invited young people to consider education as a vocation and Circuits to support them;
- Encourages Circuits and churches to recruit governors for local schools;
- Asked Circuits and Districts to sponsor new Methodist schools where appropriate.

The Conference also agreed to:

- maintain and extend Methodist engagement with schools;
- pursue educational excellence;
- develop a confident Methodist ethos and working together with local partnerships including local heritage sites;
- prioritise areas of need.

Methodist Church House

The Conference received a report from the Methodist Council, which updated the Conference on the work that had been undertaken so far in relation to Methodist Church House. It heard that, in the light of the significant change of circumstances since the decision had been made to rebuild Methodist Church House, the Council had agreed to discontinue the proposed redevelopment. Instead, the Council now recommended that Methodist Church House be sold, with the proceeds of the sale used for alternative office accommodation for the Connexional Team in London. Under the terms of the required Charity Commission Scheme for the Centenary Hall Trust, the Conference confirmed the decision to sell Methodist Church House.

Deliverance Ministry

The Conference adopted interim guidelines for deliverance ministry, brought by the Methodist Council and the Faith and Order Committee. The Faith and Order Committee is undertaking some further theological reflection on deliverance ministry which will be presented

to the 2022 Conference. The guidelines include the safeguards that such ministry should only be undertaken within a liturgical framework, should never be undertaken by only one person, should not be used for people under 18 years old, and should not be used in an attempt to change a recipient's sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Conference appointed a Connexional Panel on Deliverance Ministry which will have, amongst other things, oversight of this ministry, training materials, appointing of practitioners. The Panel will also act as an advisory body for deliverance ministry in the Methodist Church, particularly for District Chairs who will be the point of contact for those recommended for training. Feedback on the guidance is being sought: guidancefeedback@methodistchurch.org.uk

Climate Change and Fossil Fuels

The Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) reported to the Conference on the further work undertaken in respect of investment in fossil fuels. In the light of this further work, JACEI has advised the Central Finance Board to disinvest from a number of companies, which are believed not to be aligned with the Paris Agreement goals.

Holy Communion and online worship

The Conference agreed to adopt a three year period of active discernment on the issue of Holy Communion and online worship, during which churches will be encouraged "with reverence and joy, to a time of discernment, both experiencing and reflecting upon what it might mean to celebrate the Lord's Supper online and to use this as an opportunity to discuss the issues raised in our churches thereby deepening our understanding of our life together."

In adopting the proposed period of discernment (beginning on 1 September 2021), the Conference commended the report to Districts and Circuits for study and reflection, and invited feedback.

Reflective Supervision

The Conference adopted the Reflective Supervision Policy for ordained ministers in the active work and those in designated lay roles within the Methodist Church. A review of the implementation of the policy, including its extension to relevant lay roles, is to be brought to the Conference of 2026.

The Conference thanked the Revd Dr Jane Leach, making her final report as Connexional Director of Supervision, for her work in this area.

Ministry in the Methodist Church

After a period of consultation and feedback on the draft Statement, the Conference adopted *Ministry in the Methodist Church* as a considered Statement of the judgment of the Conference.

Alongside the formal Statement, the Changing Patterns of Ministry report considered the life of the Church in respect of the context of ministry, for those who are lay and ordained, and some of the practical considerations and challenges connected with that.

The Conference adopted the recommendation that the office of Local Lay-Pastor be established with the Ministries Committee directed to establish details of the scope of the role, its training and licensing. The Conference also adopted a new understanding of itinerancy as a characteristic of ministry in the Methodist Church, directing that this be brought to the attention of all candidates and probationers. Some aspects of stationing matching process will also be reviewed and to ensure there is a clear process for enabling some presbyters to serve in local, pioneer and specific cultural or language appointments.

The Ministries Committee is to produce a resource detailing guidance for "good endings" to help manage Church relationships when appointments end.

Budget

In presenting the budget, the Connexional Treasurer, the Revd Tim Swindell and the Director of Finance and Resources, Matt Tattersall, told the Conference that there is a deficit in the pension scheme and a fall in income over the previous year which has led the budget to be further revised. Mr Swindell told the Conference that "The Church is full of tired people and we all need them to recover. We are right to be ambitious but we don't have limitless people or resources."

The Conference adopted a resolution asking for churches, Circuits and Districts to give, according to their ability, towards a target of 15% of their reserves to address the pension deficit. It adopted a budget which is based on a reduction in the District Assessment of 1% in 2021/2022.

Oversight and Trusteeship

The Conference reaffirmed the *Our Calling* vision statement, which was launched 21 years ago, and adopted it as the primary strategic driver for the Church's work.

The Conference adopted resolutions that raise the minimum size of a local church to 12 members from six with churches being asked to examine creative

ways of working with other local churches so they are not over-burdened with matters of trusteeship; and directed that work continues towards the creation of a Connexional Council as the connexional trustee body, and to replace the Methodist Council and Strategy and Resources Committee.

Work to review the constitution of the Conference and its ways of working will carry on in the coming year with a report coming before the 2022 Conference.

A Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning will be set up with the aim of reconfiguring the district structure more appropriately.

Marriage and Relationships

A report on marriage and relationships, '*God in Love Unites Us*', was received by the Conference in 2019 and the District Synods were asked to consider the provisional resolutions and report back to the 2021 Conference. The Conference received a report on the results of the Synod votes (which showed that 29 out of the 30 Synods confirmed support for the provisional resolutions) and on the range of views expressed in the Synods and by ecumenical and overseas partners.

The Conference confirmed provisional resolutions on the principles or qualities of good relating, understanding of cohabitation and same sex marriages conducted on Methodist premises or by Methodist office-holders.

The Theology of Safeguarding

The Conference adopted *The Theology of Safeguarding* and commended it for study and reflection throughout the Connexion. The report explores the theological roots of safeguarding, how theological thinking is used, the failure to challenge inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, how churches can welcome people who have experienced abuse, grappling with power and forgiveness and change. It also explores spiritual abuse and the trauma of abuse and acknowledges how the Methodist Church has cause to repent, seek forgiveness and take responsibility for past actions.

Notices of Motion

The Conference expressed its concern and support for campaigns in the following areas:

- Changes to the social care system and the work led by Methodist Homes (MHA) to #FixCareForAll;
- The situation in Myanmar;
- The recent cuts to the foreign aid budget;
- The change to the immigration rules, particularly as they impact refugees;
- Climate justice as we approach the COP26 climate change conference in November.

All We Can

In the All We Can report to the Conference, the Methodist Relief and Development charity detailed its work.

Since September 2019 All We Can has had a transformational and measurable impact upon the lives of 2,139, 475 people and has partnered 22 local organisations in six countries. Due to the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 on All We Can's local partners, a significant portion of the charity's workload was spent responding to this ongoing emergency situation. All We Can's long term development partners and other local organisations were supported to pivot their programmes to assist communities in coping with the impact of COVID-19.

Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

The Conference received a report from the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society, which set out the activities of the Society in the last year. The Conference asked that collaborative conversations take place to consider how the covenant relationship between the Church and its supernumeraries and their widowed spouses can be expressed fully and appropriately in the housing of supernumeraries, and to bring recommendations to the Council.

Methodist Women in Britain

The Conference received a presentation from Methodist Women in Britain, which marked the tenth anniversary since the group was established. They shared the highlights of their work over the past ten years.

3Generate

3Generate, the annual Children and Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church took a different form in 2020 and became 3Generate365, a year-round process of engagement with children and young people in their local setting to enable them to listen to God, discern what God is saying, deepen their faith and be confident in being evangelists sharing their faith with others. The Conference reaffirmed the importance of hearing the voices of children and young people in discerning future direction, and directed that there is such consultation when revising strategic policies.

Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

The Conference adopted a far-reaching Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, which will see "a profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church". As it is rolled out, the strategy will support Methodists with issues of equality, diversity

and inclusion, with the aim of becoming a Church in which God's unconditional love is expressed in word and actions and where all people are able to play their part.

The strategy's recommendations include a celebration of the richness of the Church's diversity and opportunities to learn more of, and to be changed by, God through encounter with each other across the Church.

Comprehensive training on topics of racism, gender, disability and LGBT+ awareness will be mandatory for anyone in a leadership role. The strategy will also introduce moves to ensure that the leadership of the Church reflects the diversity of its membership. A series of structures, processes and practices will be put in place to ensure that people are treated with justice and dignity and that the discipline of the Methodist Church is upheld in the face of discrimination; preventing, challenging and redressing all behaviours which are discriminatory or belittling.

Ecumenical Matters

The Ecumenical report to the Methodist Conference detailed how the global pandemic has seen already existing good relationships with ecumenical partners, in most cases, grow stronger as we have continued to share experience and expertise in support of one another.

The Revd Helen Cameron has served as Moderator elect of the Free Churches Group from April 2021 and will become Moderator in April 2022.

The Conference received the report of the Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group, which proposed that a new, successor, group be established, to be named *Life in Covenant*. The Conference approved the terms of reference for the new group and appointed the Revd Ruth Gee as its Methodist co-Chair.

Memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion. This year, the Conference considered and replied to 44 memorials on topics including marriage and relationships, online communion, oversight and trusteeship, local preachers' training, finances and the pandemic, fossil fuels, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

Israel Palestine

In response to four memorials which were received on the subject of the Kairos Palestine statement 'Cry for Hope', the Conference commended the document

for study, whilst acknowledging the complexity of the situation. The Conference also adopted the reply to memorials presented to the 2020 Conference, and which were referred to the Methodist Council for full consideration.

Conversion Therapy

The Conference received a memorial calling for a ban on Conversion Therapy in any form. The Conference agreed to support and adopt the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' definition of conversion therapy, to call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to consider, draft and publish a policy on 'Conversion Therapy', called on the UK Government to ban the practice without further delay, and to consider further the most appropriate way in which to engage with HM Government on this issue.

President and Vice-President designated for 2022-2023

The Conference designated the Revd Graham Thompson to be President and Anthony Boateng to be Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2022/2023.

Appointments

The Conference made a number of appointments and reappointments, including:

The Revd Michaela Youngson as Assistant Secretary of the Conference for a period of six years from 1 September 2021.

The Revd Dr Janet Corlett as Chair for the Isle of Man District from 1 September 2021; the Revd Daniel Haylett as Chair for the Plymouth and Exeter District from 1 September 2022; the Revd Novette Headley as Chair for the Birmingham District from 1 September 2022.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Telford from 23-30 June 2022


The Methodist Church

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