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Conference Business Digest

A report for local churches about the business of the 2020 Methodist Conference

The 2020 Methodist Conference, held online: Presbyteral Session 25-26 June; Representative Session 27 June – 1 July. www.methodist.org.uk/conference2020

Election and Induction of the President and Vice-President

On Saturday 27th June the Revd Richard Teal was elected and inducted as the new President of the Methodist Conference. The President chose the final words of John Wesley as his theme for this year, 'The best of all is, God is with us' and spoke in his address of the orientation of the Church.

The Vice-President, Carolyn Lawrence, was also elected and inducted. Carolyn is part of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and spoke of her love for the church flawed though it is in her address to the Conference.

- The text and video of the Vice-Presidential address is [here](#).
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Reception into Full Connexion

Due to the online nature of this year's Conference, presbyters and deacons were received into Full Connexion remotely, with each candidate making their promises individually. Twenty-one presbyters and four deacons were received into Full Connexion along with six presbyters by transfer and one presbyter by reinstatement. The ordinations have been postponed to a date to be determined; until then, those received and yet to be ordained will be known as 'Ordinands in Full Connexion'.

Ethical investment

The Conference received a report from the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI), the body that advises the Central Finance Board on investment ethics. A Notice of Motion was presented to the Conference which requested that JACEI recommend to the CFB disinvestment before the 2021 Conference from all oil and gas companies which are not currently aligned with the Paris Agreement target of a global temperature rise well below 2 degrees. The Conference resolved to refer the request to the Methodist Council.

Inclusive Methodist Church

The Conference voted to bolster and increase the work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) throughout the Connexion, through the development of the Inclusive Methodist Church Strategy. The Conference agreed to thorough scrutiny of the implementation of the strategy, better collection and analysis of appropriate EDI statistics, and a transparent system for monitoring and reviewing stationing outcomes with regard to EDI concerns. It called on Methodists to engage in their own contexts, to confront and challenge all racism and other forms of unjust discrimination; and directed every Circuit to convene a forum for reflection, conversation and planning to ensure that such actions are carried out in each local context. It also voted to incorporate work already started to ensure people who are intersex or transgender are included in the life of the Church, into the Inclusive Church Strategy.

The Methodist Church's work on EDI can be found here: www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/

Oversight and Trusteeship

The Conference voted through the next steps of work around plans to simplify the oversight and trustee structure of the Methodist Church in Britain with the aim of providing greater support; enabling ministry, mission and broader strategic thinking; and promoting better coordination. The Conference invited comments on the report from around the Connexion.

Representatives heard that the changes are necessary in order to ensure the Church can better comply with its obligations as a charity and direct its resources and focus its energies on the mission of the Church.

A raft of proposals for change to the current structure now go to the next stage of consideration including reviewing the number of Church Councils, a review of the size of the Conference and a wide-ranging review of the constitution and function of all connexional committees. The Conference directed that a proposal is brought to the 2021 Conference to raise the minimum size for a Local Church, together with examples of creative ways in

which one Church on multiple sites and/or federations of classes under a united Church Council can enable local missional communities to flourish. In the light of this, the Conference further directed all Circuit Meetings to review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and encourages Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling. In considering the make up of the various trustee bodies, and in the light of the concerns related to equality and diversity issues, the Conference directed that Circuit Meetings and Church Councils should undertake Unconscious Bias related training.

Connexional finances and allowances

The Conference received the Statement of Connexional Finances for 2018/2019. It adopted the Connexional Central Services Budget for 2020/2021 but noted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will necessitate a significant change in the figures presented. In the light of that, it directed the Methodist Council to review all activities currently planned for 2020/2021 to ensure that only necessary work goes ahead and to reduce expenditure to a minimum where possible. The Conference directed the Council to approve a revised budget for 2020/2021 as soon as is practicable.

The Methodist Church Fund assessment for 2020/2021 is budgeted at £13.8m, in line with a previous decision to restrict increases to 1% per annum.

Using the formula agreed by the Conference, the level of increase in the standard stipend will be 2.7% to £25,524.

Statistics for Mission

The Conference was reminded that it met 200 years after the Wesleyan Methodist Conference of 1820 held in Liverpool, at which it recorded the first ever decrease of members in the British circuits and responded with a series of resolutions on pastoral work, known today as the *Liverpool Minutes*. It was in the light of that historical context that the Conference received the triennial statistical returns. They noted, as of 31 October 2019, a total membership of almost 170,000, and an average weekly attendance of just over 133,000. 'Methodism in Numbers 2020' can be read here: www.methodist.org.uk/media/17152/methodism_in_numbers_2020.pdf

Evangelism and Growth Strategy

The Conference voted overwhelmingly to implement a new Church-wide strategy for Evangelism and Growth. *God for All* commits the Church theologically, culturally, and financially to deepen its mission to be a growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking, and inclusive Church and is the result of a year-long consultation across the Connexion involving thousands of conversations with

leaders, practitioners, and ecumenical partners.

In the context of declining membership numbers, *God for All* prioritises helping new people become disciples of Jesus, starting new churches, and raising up new lay and ordained leaders to join God in engaging diverse rural, urban, estate, and suburban communities across Britain. The strategy also focuses significant energy and resources on developing the role of young evangelists, serving communities experiencing marginalisation, expanding the Church's digital presence, and helping Methodists live out their faith in everyday life.

God for All will launch in September with a focused Year of Prayer that will offer the Church's work to God.

3Generate

The Methodist Youth President, Thelma Commey presented the report of 3Generate, the Methodist Church's Children and Youth Assembly to the Conference and spoke of the decision to change the format of 3Generate for 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Plans for the 2020 event at the NEC in Birmingham were postponed with 3Generate moving to a new format focused on year-round, local engagement to be called *3Generate 365* and to be launched in September. The Conference commended the planning for *3Generate 365*, which will launch in September 2020, as a means by which the voice of children and young people will be able to be heard at the 2021 Conference.

The 3Generate manifesto this year focuses on the life of the Church and the Church's position within the world. Among the challenges are to ensure that God is in the Church's conversations and to ensure that the Church is kind, helpful and respectful and working towards being inclusive and welcoming. The manifesto also calls for the Church to be better resourced to support people, particularly the young, who face mental health issues and for more churches to be eco-friendly with the Church challenging those in power on issues of climate change, poverty and peace. In particular, it urged every Church Council to include the 'Eco Church challenge' on its agenda during the next connexional year.

Methodist Homes (MHA)

The Methodist Conference received a report from Sam Monaghan, the Chief Executive of MHA. The Conference learned of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on MHA with more than 430 residents from its care-homes, three staff and a number of live-at-home clients having died as a result of the virus. Sam also shared the impact that the pandemic has had emotionally on staff and residents.

Occupancy rates at MHA care-homes have reduced from around 90% pre-Covid-19, to around 77% and could take up to two years to recover. Fundraising opportunities have also been reduced. These factors will see a

reduction in income for MHA of an estimated £20million this year and the need for MHA to make £5million of savings.

Sam called upon the Methodist Church to support MHA, to pray and to call for testing, Personal Protective Equipment, funding and for those in later life not be marginalised.

Faith and Order matters

It was agreed to defer consideration of Ministry in the Methodist Church until the 2021 Conference. However, a report was brought concerning Changing Patterns of Ministry, which explored some of the aspects of ministry which had been identified as requiring further reflection. Most of the resolutions attached to this report were deferred, but the Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Authorisations Committee to review the criteria for authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper. The Conference directed further work on ensuring that there are clear processes for enabling presbyters to serve in particular contexts, and in preparing provisional guidance for those considering such appointments. A report will be brought to the 2021 Conference.

Receiving an interim report on exorcism and the need to ensure safe practice and robust systems of accountability in this area, the Conference directed the Council to oversee the process of producing guidelines for the authorisation, training and supervision of those seeking to engage in deliverance ministry and to report to the 2021 Conference. It further directed that, for the interim, no member of the Methodist Church is authorised to participate in any act that might be interpreted as constituting exorcism of a person. Where a situation arises to which the existing guidelines apply, the Chair of District should be consulted to explore referral to another Church.

The Conference noted the Faith and Order Committee's work in the area of theology of online life, particularly in the present context. In response to a notice of motion, the Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in the light of current experience of online worship to produce guidance on how appropriate participation in services of Holy Communion by those attending online might be encouraged. It also directed the Committee to undertake further reflection on Holy Communion and to bring a report and recommendations regarding 'online communion' to the 2021 Conference.

Ministerial Covenant

The 2017 Conference had received a report on a proposed Ministerial Code of Conduct. Following consultation, it had been redrawn as a Ministerial Covenant with questions for reflection against which ministers can examine themselves with the help of a

supervisor or mentor and questions for those working with ministers. The Conference commended it to the Connexion for study and response, asking for a further report in 2022.

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 10 Memorials on topics including: Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Homes and the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust, internet banking, local preachers and worship leaders training support, ethical concerns with pension funds, listed buildings, global climate emergency, investment, and Israel and Palestine.

The 2021/2022 President and Vice-President

The Conference designated the Revd Sonia Hicks to be President and Mrs Barbara Easton to be Vice-President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022.

Appointments

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

The Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler as Secretary of the Conference for a period of six years from 1 September 2020; the Revd Ruth M Gee as Assistant Secretary for the connexional year 2020/2021; Mrs Joanne Anderton as Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice.

The Revd Dawn Saunders as Chair for the Channel Islands District from 1 September 2020; the Revd Andrew de Ville as Chair for the Southampton District from 1 September 2020; the Revd Nigel Cowgill as Chair for the London District for a further period of four years from 1 September 2021; the Revd Julian Pursehouse as Chair for the East Anglia District for a further period of four years from 1 September 2020.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Birmingham from 24 June – 1 July 2021

The **Methodist Church**



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