A look back at the Conference

The 2014 Conference met at the Birmingham Metropole. This document provides an overview of some of the decisions of the Conference. For the full details, please see the Minutes of the Conference and www.methodistconference.org.uk

The Revd Kenneth G Howcroft was inducted as President and Ms Gill Dascombe as the Vice-President of the Conference.

On the afternoon and evening of 29 July, six Ordination Services were held at venues across the West Midlands.

Marriage and Civil Partnerships
The Conference received a report from a working party established by the 2013 Conference which was asked to explore the implications of the same sex marriage legislation and to recommend whether the Conference should set in motion a process to revisit its definition of marriage. It now urges the Methodist people, under the guidance of the Spirit, to engage with each other honestly, prayerfully and graciously in a process of deep reflection and discernment about the issues raised in the report.

The Conference concurred with the recommendation of the working party not to revisit the definition of marriage at this point, but that there should be a two-year period of listening, reflection and discernment about relationships on a much wider basis, based upon thinking about living with contradictory convictions and the nature of the authority of the Bible.

The Conference resolved that, whilst recognising that the 1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality would still apply to all relationships, the ruling regarding those entering civil partnerships, namely that there is no reason per se to prevent anyone within the Church, ordained or lay, from entering into or remaining within such a relationship, should also extend to those entering into legally contracted same sex marriages.

The General Secretary’s Report
The Conference received the General Secretary’s report which, in addition to including a report on the work of the Connexional Team, concentrated on three main points:

- Relationship building; deepening partnerships both within the
connexion and with historic and newer ecumenical partners.

- Releasing our buildings for mission; ensuring that buildings and financial resources are available for and used to ensure the most effective and faithful use of God’s gifts.
- Realising the main thing; a growing desire to reclaim evangelism as a crucial part of God’s mission as the main thing is all that the Methodist Church does.

The Conference also adopted proposals to replace the post of Secretary of the Conference and General Secretary with a newly configured post of Secretary of the Conference. The Secretary will be the senior person in a three person senior team with the Assistant Secretary and the Connexional Secretary reporting to her/him.

3Generate
The Conference received a report of 3Generate: Children and Youth Assembly 2013. Amongst other recommendations, the Conference noted that all people employed as children and youth workers should undergo training on mental health issues affecting young people. The Conference directed that the Youth President should have the right to attend and speak at the Methodist Council, but not vote.

One Mission
Further to a decision of the 2012 Conference to absorb the work of the Methodist Missionary Society into the life of the Methodist Church, the Conference received a report which made specific recommendations as to how One Mission (adopted by the 2013 Conference) is overseen, promoted, held accountable and embedded in the life of the Methodist people and the Methodist Church. The Conference made changes to a number of standing orders to incorporate One Mission in to the life of the Connexion and established a One Mission Forum, to enable representatives of the Districts to confer, share insights and develop vision, thereby assisting the Church in developing and implementing a strategic vision for mission which is both local and global.

The Anglican-Methodist Covenant
The Conference endorsed the recommendation that the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England and the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church

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work together to bring forward proposals for:

- the Methodist Church to consider afresh expressing the Conference’s ministry of oversight in a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry and the Church of England to recognise that ministry in the Methodist Church as a sign of continuity in faith, worship and mission in a church that is in the apostolic succession;
- the Church of England and the Methodist Church to address the question of reconciling, with integrity, the existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries of our two churches, which would lead to the interchangeability of ministries.

The Conference adopted the recommendation that a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group should be established, with access to the key policy making bodies of our churches, to replace the Joint Implementation Commission.

Israel and Palestine
In continuing to express its concern for peace in Israel/Palestine the Conference received a report on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. The Conference, amongst other resolutions:

- commended the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Briefing produced by the Methodist Council to the Methodist people for study, reflection and prayer either as individuals or with others.
- directed the Methodist people to the resolutions of the Methodist Conference in 2010 as they offer to the Church a variety of ways in which people might engage prayerfully and practically with the region.

Connexional Finances
The Conference noted that:

- At the end of the year, the Church recorded a net deficit before transfers and revaluations of £3 million (2012: £7.8 million surplus). Total incoming resources for the year were £47.2 million, up 4% on the previous year and total resources expended increased by 33% to £50.3 million (£37.8 million in 2012).
- Circuits and Districts may not be able to sustain the current level of assessment and requested that the Methodist Council gives consideration to the appropriate level and timing and release of reserves from connexional funds.

Other matters proposed as Notices of Motion were adopted. These include:

- expressing the concern of the Conference regarding the humanitarian needs in Syria;
- noting the vast international injustice of caste discrimination;
- noting with grave concern the ongoing activities in northern Nigeria;
- encouraging the Methodist people to take up a prayer for peace and reconciliation, jointly written by Christians from North and South Korea;
- expressing its condolence to the Church of Pakistan following
the loss of life at Peshawar in September 2013, and assuring Christians in Pakistan of the continuing prayers of the Methodist people in Britain as they continue to witness and worship;

- calling on Members of Parliament to oppose the replacement of Trident and urging the Methodist people to engage with their MPs on this issue;
- requesting the Council, whenever possible, to ensure that future contracts connected with the Conference are only entered into with employers who pay the living wage;
- expressing the gratitude of the Conference for the ongoing work and support of the Joseph Rank Trust;
- recording its deep appreciation for the work and life of those places of training and formation that, from September 2014, will no longer be engaged in initial ministerial training;

- welcoming the outstanding inspection report on the Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham by the Churches Quality in Formation Panel and congratulating the staff and students;
- directing all District Policy Committees to ensure that a full review of current buildings and societies be conducted against the criteria of vitality, vision, location and available resources;
- directing the Methodist Council to establish a working party to consider the need to make available resources and training to resource leadership roles;
- encouraging synods, where they are sending four or more representatives to the Conference, to elect at least one representative who is under the age of thirty;
- encouraging members to support the No More Page Three campaign and to sign the online petition.