

45. Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership

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Resolutions	45/1. The Conference receives the report. 45/2. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to bring a report on the Role of the District Chair to the 2023 Conference.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	To offer some theological reflection on oversight, trusteeship and leadership, and bring to the attention of the Conference matters of faith and order in relation to the Report on Oversight and Trusteeship.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Relatedness, Participation, Conferring and the language of Representation • Oversight • Trusteeship • Leadership • Matters of faith and order arising from the work on Oversight and Trusteeship
Background documents	The report on oversight and trusteeship elsewhere in the Agenda <i>Oversight and Trusteeship, 2021</i> <i>Faith and Order Committee: Oversight and Trusteeship, 2021</i> <i>Ministry in the Methodist Church, 2021</i>

1. Introduction

- 1.1. God's mission lies at the heart of the nature, identity and purpose of the Church. As Christians, together, respond to God's call, the ministry of the Church is exercised. Through the Spirit, God has given diverse and complementary gifts to each and every member of the Church for building up the people of God as the Body of Christ. All members of the Methodist Church therefore have a part to play in sharing the love of God and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the Church and in the world. Local Churches are entrusted to discern how they are being called to share in God's mission in their context, and thus determine what their response and priorities should be and how their resources should be used.
- 1.2. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp focus some of the challenges that the Methodist Church in Britain was already facing in the 21st century. Methodists across the Connexion are discerning what God is calling them to and, in response, are exploring how they might work together, what kind of leadership they need, and how they might be better structured in order to share in God's mission. In 2020 and 2021 the Conference received reports on Oversight and Trusteeship, which began to look at these questions in relation to connexional structures.

- 1.3. How Christians work and live together expresses and reveals their identity as the Body of Christ. Churches are continually invited to consider the question: “How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?”¹ For the Methodist Church, its structure and ways of working must reflect the nature and self-understanding of the Church as a Connexion and of the Conference as central to its life and purpose. Methodists cherish connexionalism as a gift they have inherited.² It witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God, describing a way of relating in which individual people, fellowship groups, Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and other Methodist bodies do not exist for themselves but for others. To be in connexion is not a matter of co-existence, but shared existence. It involves being accountable to one another.
- 1.4. The Faith and Order Committee drew to the attention of the 2021 Conference various Methodist emphases that needed consideration as part of the work on oversight and trusteeship.³ It offered some reflection on relatedness, participation and conferring also as a resource “for Local Churches and Circuits as they think through their committee structures, ways of relating, and processes of discernment and decision-making.”⁴ This report expands that reflection; recalling those emphases, looking at how Methodists understand oversight, trusteeship and leadership, and inviting Methodists to consider how this might shape current work and decisions. Whilst section 6 of this report contains some specific comments regarding the report on oversight and trusteeship to the 2022 Conference, it is hoped that Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and connexional bodies will engage with the contents of this report as they look at questions around oversight, trusteeship, leadership, ways of working, and ways of organizing themselves so as to be better enabled to share in God’s mission.
- 1.5. Sections 3, 4 and 5 explore the concepts of oversight, trusteeship and leadership, but it is first helpful to remember the three Methodist emphases previously outlined (relatedness, participation and conferring)⁵ and look at the language used in relation to ‘representation’.

2. **Relatedness, Participation, Conferring and the language of Representation**

There are particular emphases in Methodist theology and ecclesiology which help Methodists to think through matters of oversight, trusteeship and leadership. The Faith and Order Committee encourages engagement with these emphases as decisions are made in all parts of the Church’s life.

2.1. **Relatedness**

An emphasis on ‘**relatedness**’ as essential to the concept of ‘church’ finds expression in the ‘connexional principle’ (see 1.3 above). Alongside reflection on how different parts of the church interconnect, this might also mean looking at how connexional structures and ways of working could model something to districts, circuits and local churches, and thus be a gift to the whole of the Methodist Church. Consideration of the power dynamics within and between different bodies and the effects this has on conferring is important. It is often useful to consider questions about who makes the decisions, who the gatekeepers are (for example, who decides what goes onto an agenda), who presides over the particular body, and who

¹ World Council of Churches, 1982, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, M6

² *The Gift of Connexionalism*, 2017

³ *The Faith and Order Committee: Oversight and Trusteeship*, 2021

⁴ *The Faith and Order Committee: Oversight and Trusteeship*, 2021, 1

⁵ See further the report *Faith and Order Committee: Oversight and Trusteeship*, 2021

decides who the decision-makers are. Paying attention to ways of working enables openness, conversation, trust and confidence to develop. Questions around conflict management and the mechanisms for resolution also merit attention.

2.2. Participation

2.2.1. An emphasis on **participation** flows from the centrality of 'relatedness' and is an aspect of the Methodist understanding of oversight as something that is shared. The Faith and Order Committee notes that participation has often been associated with language about representation (see 2.4 below), but this is too frequently interpreted in a particular and narrow way which assumes that a small number of individuals can satisfactorily represent diverse bodies or (sometimes) large constituencies within the life of the Church. A greater focus on active participation might be more helpful in relation to representation as it provokes bodies to think about how well they are listening to all parts of the church, to ask who might feel marginalised and why, to pay attention to questions of power, to strive to be transparent, to think about effective communication, to look at what the body needs at a particular time, and to be willing to be changed by engaging with different communities within the Methodist Church.

2.2.2. Participation has its roots in the communal dimension of ministry and the way of ordering the Church that enables the whole Body of Christ to take responsibility for reflecting on its faith and mission. Conciliar governance gathers and focuses the authority that is given and distributed throughout the whole Body of Christ in a representative way as it takes counsel and listens for God's voice, not least through the experience and faith of baptised believers. Within the Methodist tradition and experience, it is appropriate to ask how our structures for consultation and decision-making truly reflect the conciliar character of the Church and involve the shared sense of faith of the Methodist people.

2.2.3. When thinking about participation, it can be helpful to consider three things: **constitutionality** (i.e. that the scope and limits to authority are agreed and acknowledged by the whole of the Methodist Church, and checks and balances need to be built in to prevent any abuse of power); **representation** (i.e. the authority of the whole Body is exercised through its appointed/elected representatives, whose primary role is to listen for the Spirit's guidance and discern God's will); and **consent** (ie the governed must agree to how they are governed and have a say in it. Authority is constrained by the need to listen to those who are governed. Any decisions that lack this consensus lack integrity and force.)

2.3. Conferring

2.3.1. The third emphasis is **conferring**. Christian conferring is a gift of God through which people take spiritual and theological counsel together in order to grow together in holiness. It is "prayer-guided, gracious, heart-to-heart engagement" which shapes disciplined and faithful discipleship. The Methodist Conference has noted that it is:

"a process of intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue to which there are two important, complementary strands. As they confer, people intentionally, prayerfully and thoughtfully seek to describe and analyse their experience and to listen to others doing the same, and they give and receive guidance,

advice, challenge and support. In this they are exercising both mutual accountability and supervision. These complementary strands are two sides of the one coin.”⁶

- 2.3.2. Two things have particularly shaped Methodist practice and understanding: John Wesley’s calling together of his itinerant preachers to confer, and his identifying Christian conferring as a means of grace. Although it is now common to think of conferring in terms of how Methodists make decisions, the original emphasis was more on discernment and spiritual growth. It began to take a particular form when Wesley invited a number of preachers to join him in discerning God’s will for the Methodist movement in a form similar to that of the Class Meetings. It was guided by prayer; it demanded robust and honest personal engagement as participants reflected on their experience and exercised mutual accountability, and it was to help shape a disciplined and faithful discipleship within his preachers as they together sought to discern God’s will and catch a vision of what God required of them. Wesley developed specific questions to sharpen the purpose of conferring: what to teach, how to teach, what to do – questions which relate to content, method and strategy. These early Methodist conferences, which were intended to support the development of the Methodist movement, inevitably provoked sometimes heated debate among the participants. Effective conferring required honesty, a willingness to account for one’s spiritual life, to listen and to be challenged.
- 2.3.3. Wesley also identified conferring as a means of grace, believing that Christian conversation was a means of drawing people into a closer relationship with God and that God is always present in its practice. It involves a preparedness to be changed by the experience.
- 2.3.4. Methodist conferring typically involves a series of conversations involving Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and the Conference. This still shapes the governance structure of the Methodist Church, but it is perhaps timely to consider whether something of the importance of ‘holy conversation’ has been lost. It is useful to reflect on how such conferring might embody some of the characteristics of conversation, namely openness and flexibility, being responsive to change and new possibilities, and the accommodation of new voices. Taking note of and reporting a conversation shows how a particular conclusion was reached and which alternatives were considered, and encourages further reflection and communal engagement.
- 2.3.5. Conferring is a vital aspect of discernment and it is timely to give further attention to the question of how Methodists can confer well together. It would be helpful to further explore: how conferring is resourced and supported; the difference between conferring and consultation; and how different modes of conferring help, inhibit and shape the nature of the conferring that takes place. (Conferring by email, for example, can be expedient but is a limited means of conversation.)

2.4. The Language of Representation

- 2.4.1. When the language of representation is used in conversations about oversight, trusteeship and leadership it may mean different things. Representation, in the sense of representative leadership refers to those who discern the spirit of God and respond (through making decisions) on behalf of

⁶ *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 2.15

and for the whole (whether that is the Local Church, Circuit, District or whole Connexion). Representatives are usually those who are elected or chosen by a constituency of people to exercise this kind of leadership in a particular context (for example, representatives from the Districts in the Conference). Within the Methodist Church representatives are not usually delegates ie district representatives to the Methodist Conference are not mandated to speak on behalf of their district, although they will bring to the discernment and decision-making processes their experience and the particular perspectives and resources of their sending context.

- 2.4.2. Occasionally there are representatives whose role it is to represent the views of a particular body (for example the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee will represent the views of the Faith and Order Committee). Where there are representatives whose role it is to reflect the views of a specific body or area in the life of the Methodist Church, then consideration will need to be given to the means by which they are appropriately accountable to and equipped by that constituency (eg representatives of concerns of equality, diversity and inclusion, the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly, the Faith and Order and Law and Polity Committees).
- 2.4.3. In the light of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy, 'representation' can also refer to concerns about inclusion and the need to ensure that the diversity of the Methodist Church is reflected in its decision making bodies.
- 2.4.4. The conciliar and connexional nature of the Methodist Church leads to structures of representative leadership, governance and management, but having such structures without awareness of power dynamics can create toxic hierarchies of authority. Reflecting on the structures and dynamics of authority is essential and requires self-awareness, an openness to hearing critique, and a committed intention to pay attention to these matters.
- 2.5. It should be noted that there are various emphases that are important to Methodists and which may sometimes create tensions in the exercise of oversight and trusteeship. Being open and realistic about this is crucial. For example, an emphasis on participation may suggest the need for all or many to be directly involved in decision-making, whereas an emphasis on representative leadership suggests that a minority may act for and on behalf of the majority in matters of governance. How these tensions are balanced is a matter for discussion and discernment as issues arise in every part of the life of the Methodist Church. It will always be helpful to remember what is valuable at each end of the spectrum when difficult decisions have to be made. The tension between subsidiarity and centralized decisions, for example, is a real one, but defining the limits of both in a particular context is crucial.
- 2.6. Having considered what is important to Methodists about the way in which they work together and order and structure themselves, attention is turned to what is being expressed and enabled within these structures, processes and ways of being. Oversight, trusteeship and leadership are frequently referred to together, but they are different things and it is vital to distinguish between them.

3. Oversight⁷

- 3.1. Oversight (episkope) is the function of ensuring that the Church remains faithful to its calling. It involves “the process of reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world.” It has always been necessary to the life of the Church, and a key feature of that oversight is ensuring the continuity of the Church in the apostolic faith and mission. In the Methodist Church that continuity is visibly located in the Conference.
- 3.2. “The words 'oversight' and 'episkope' convey a range of meanings. Some of these are given focus in the biblical image of the shepherd, which speaks of pastoral care and a concern for unity; it also speaks of leadership, enabling the Church to share in God's mission and maintaining and developing structures appropriate to that task. The exercise of episkope also reminds the Church of its roots in Scripture and tradition and encourages it to be open to the Spirit's leading in the contemporary context. Episkope includes the exercise of authority, a sometimes uncongenial concept which is nevertheless required by church order.”⁸
- 3.3. In the 2013 World Council of Churches' convergence document, *The Church Towards a Common Vision*, the ministry of oversight is described as a “ministry of co-ordination” so that the diversity of gifts given by the Holy Spirit “may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission.”⁹ It involves aspects of watching over, watching out for, monitoring, discerning, disciplining, directing, guiding, encouraging and caring.¹⁰ One of the functions of those in oversight is to help the group discern God's will. Ensuring that this is given priority and attention is vital, and therefore creating and holding the space in which this can happen is a part of the role of all who exercise oversight in the Methodist Church (whether individuals, committees or other bodies).
- 3.4. The Methodist Church exercises a corporate and connexional form of oversight, corporately through the Conference and by designated individuals on behalf of the Conference. Oversight is shared between different groups and individuals and different formal bodies and types of 'officer' across the Methodist Church. Consequently any exercise of personal or corporate expressions of oversight cannot be self-sufficient or independent of each other but must be intrinsically linked with the other expressions.
- 3.5. In order to hold the Methodist Church to its calling in its daily decision-making “at every level of the Church's life, individuals are appointed to a variety of offices in order to exercise particular kinds of oversight; for example in Circuits ministers and local preachers build up the Church through preaching and teaching, ministers and circuit stewards provide leadership, and Superintendents have oversight of all the ministers and probationers stationed in the Circuit.”¹¹ In each District, the Chair exercises oversight of the character and fidelity of the presbyters and presbyteral probationers, is responsible to the Conference for the observance of Methodist order and discipline.¹² Personal oversight is widely exercised in Methodism, but it is important that it should, wherever possible, be exercised in a collegial or a

⁷ Section 6 of the Conference Statement, *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2021, offers some authoritative reflection on the nature of oversight and the material in this section draws primarily from that.

⁸ *Episcopate and Episcopacy*, 2002, B6

⁹ World Council of Churches, 2013, *The Church Towards a Common Vision*, §52.

¹⁰ *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005

¹¹ The Methodist Church and the Church of England, 2017, *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, The Methodist Church, 2017, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, SO700(9)

¹² Standing Order 424

communal context. Oversight is also exercised corporately, for example in District Synods or Circuit Meetings or Church Councils. All who exercise oversight in the Methodist Church derive their authority from the Conference.

- 3.6. Those who are ordained and in full connexion with the Conference share a collegial responsibility for embodying, exercising and sharing with others the oversight that properly belongs to the Conference. Presbyters exercise a particular ministry of oversight within the life of the Church, having “a principal and directing part” in the shared duties of being “stewards in the household of God and shepherds of [God’s] flock.”¹³ They usually exercise oversight in Christian communities “offering leadership and vision, and ensuring that decisions are made according to Methodist practice.”¹⁴ This ministry is shared and comes to mature fruition¹⁵ when it is exercised in collaboration with deacons and lay people.

4. Trusteeship

- 4.1. Many bodies in the life of the Methodist Church exercise both oversight and trusteeship responsibilities, but it is important that the two are distinguished from each other. In the proposals before the 2022 Conference it is recommended that a new Connexional Council become the trustee body of the Methodist Church. Whilst it would also exercise some oversight responsibilities, these would be related to its function as a trustee body.
- 4.2. Trust and trusteeship are integral to the Church’s mission, and the understanding and exercise of trust and trusteeship must derive from the purpose of the Methodist Church to “spread scriptural holiness through the land”.¹⁶ Trusteeship is not just a governance function concerned with the ‘here and now’, but it concerns the preservation of an original intention and purpose. Trusteeship in its broad sense, relates to the preservation, maintenance, development and transmission of the apostolic mission as received by the Methodist Church. What, then must we learn from the historic location of trusteeship in the Conference, and the separation between centrally held custodian trusteeship and managing trusteeship held locally? As the context of the Methodist Church changes, it is important to review how the exercise of trusteeship should serve the original intention and purpose of Methodism’s historic mission to spread scriptural holiness.
- 4.3. One of the current narratives in the Methodist Church is that people need to be ‘freed’ from their trustee responsibilities in order to be authentic disciples. Yet exercising trusteeship is also a part of stewardship, and good governance is an aspect of mission and not just something that needs to be done in order to ensure compliance with charity (and other) law. Stewardship involves considering how the resources available are best used to enable and facilitate participation in mission (and resources include, for example, property, finance, time, and the gifts of individual members). Trusteeship is therefore an expression of discipleship rather than something that necessarily gets in the way of it, and it is important to consider questions of how people are being formed, supported and equipped for exercising such stewardship within trustee roles.
- 4.4. The Faith and Order Committee notes that the Charity Commission’s Code of Conduct outlines seven principles to help ensure that everything in good governance

¹³ Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union*

¹⁴ The Methodist Church, 2002, *What is a Presbyter?* 12

¹⁵ The Methodist Church, 2002, *What is a Presbyter?* 7

¹⁶ Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union*

points to the organisation's mission and strategy for achieving it. Of course, the nature of the Church is a sacred mystery and therefore cannot be encapsulated by charity legislation. Nevertheless, the qualities outlined are relevant to the Methodist Church since they are "key drivers of trust and confidence" and help to demonstrate trustworthiness.¹⁷ They are about developing a culture that is accountable, enabling and empowering.

4.5. The Faith and Order Committee suggests that these seven principles encapsulate important aspects of the emphases of relatedness, participation and conferring described in section 2 above. The seven principles could therefore be a useful tool for any trustee body in the Methodist Church to consider as it looks at its ways of working, and at how and who it appoints as trustees. The principles are:

- a. **Organisational Purpose**
ie being clear about what key purposes are and deciding how best to achieve them.
- b. **Leadership**
ie developing strategic leadership that can ensure that the organization has clear, relevant and time specific goals. (See further section 5 below.)
- c. **Integrity**
ie being clear about the values that underpin and shape the work of the particular trustee body, and having transparent mechanisms in place for dealing with problems. This includes being clear about potential conflicts of interest.
- d. **Decision-making, risk and control**
ie decision making methods should be informed, rigorous and timely. This should be based on effective delegation, risk appetite and control, with effective implementation of decisions and a framework for monitoring. There should be accountability in the management of resources, and a realistic assessment of the levels of and limits to delegation.
- e. **Board effectiveness**
ie do the trustees work well as a team using appropriate balances of skills, experience and knowledge to make informed decisions?
- f. **Diversity**
ie the body is more effective when it is open to a variety of perspectives, experiences and skills and it is important to ensure that there are procedures and practices for enabling this.
- g. **Openness and Accountability**
ie it is imperative in the building of trust and facilitating ownership of the goal's to be as open and transparent as possible with all stakeholders.

5. Leadership

5.1. The final concept requiring some comment is that of leadership. Questions about leadership and authority have been part of the Church's experience since its inception and leadership is exercised in many ways and at many levels of operation in the life of the Methodist Church. Although the use of the term 'leadership' is

¹⁷ <https://charitycommission.blog.gov.uk/2017/07/13/the-new-charity-governance-code-essential-reading-for-all-trustees/> Accessed on 11th April 2022

commonplace, it can be used in diverse ways and mean different things. What leadership requires and how and where it is expressed differs according to context, including the many cultural contexts of the Methodist Church in Britain. It further depends on personal relationships, power dynamics and negotiating aims and expectations. Perceptions and expressions of leadership are therefore culturally conditioned and various (and sometimes contrasting) understandings and models of leadership can be employed or assumed without consideration of how these relate to the ministry and oversight of the Methodist Church.

- 5.2. Any model and style of leadership is contextual since what is required in one context may not readily translate to another. Different cultural understandings and expectations of leadership shape what 'the leader' is and does. In any context what is meant by 'leadership', and what is expected and hoped for from any leader, needs open discussion and discernment.
- 5.3. The Methodist Conference has received many reports on leadership over the years, although much of this reflection has taken place in relation to the consideration of particular roles (such as the President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Conference). There is much rich material in previous reports as insights have been drawn from the Bible, from Methodist and wider Christian tradition, from the literature and theory of disciplines such as business, social science, management, and from the experience of the Methodist people.
- 5.4. Several reports to the Methodist Conference have identified a number of theological principles underlying the exercise of leadership in the Connexion.¹⁸ These include:
 - a. the connexional principle (see 1.3 above) and the interdependence of all parts of the connexion, within which local churches, Circuits and Districts are given the greatest possible degrees of autonomy to engage in God's mission in their local context in the best possible way.
 - b. the need to structure the Church for mission so that it is able to respond, pragmatically, when new needs or opportunities arise;
 - c. a tradition of leadership as a form of service best modelled on Christ; and
 - d. the need for the whole people of God to affirm and own the general direction of what their leaders (both corporate bodies like the Conference and Methodist Council or their equivalents in other parts of the Connexion, and also individuals) are proposing and enacting (see 2.2.2 above).

These principles shape the way in which leadership is understood and expressed in the Methodist Church. For example, they point towards models of leadership that involve collaboration and team work.

- 5.5. The language that is used about leadership affects how it is thought about and embodied. Some recent reports to the Conference express a need for leadership that is 'strategic', 'strong' and/or 'spiritual', but what these terms mean, what power dynamics are involved, and what expectations arise in any context are not spelt out. In conversations about leadership, therefore, it is vital to examine these assumptions and generic descriptions in order to expose the power dynamics and develop shared

¹⁸ *Leadership in the Methodist Church*, 2002; *Senior Leadership in the Methodist Church*, 2007 – drawing from *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999

expectations about outcomes.

- 5.6. To provide a framework for such conversations it is useful to consider the description of leadership in *The Nature of Oversight*¹⁹ report, where leadership is described as a set of interactions through which:
- a. people are inspired to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision, and are empowered to share their ideas and act upon them;
 - b. the content of that developing vision is articulated and considered;
 - c. action is initiated and people encouraged to follow;
 - d. examples are provided of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken;
 - e. guidance is given about what actions are likely to entail unwarranted risk and contravene Christian principles or the law (or both);
 - f. models are provided of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.
- 5.7. Leadership is a gift of God in the service of the Church. It is not confined to formally authorized officeholders but can arise spontaneously or from an unexpected quarter when a situation demands that an initiative be taken. The Bible offers many examples of people called by God to exercise leadership in various ways in spite of their inadequacies and failings. There is no one model of 'biblical leadership' since, within the Bible, leadership is expressed in very many different (and sometimes contrasting) ways. Leaders in the Bible served in different historical and cultural contexts and, accordingly, different demands were made of them. Similarly today, contextual differences shape expectations and define possibilities.
- 5.8. The report *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference*, 2010, noted that nevertheless "we may be helped in articulating the kind of leadership the Church needs by reflecting on some characteristics exemplified by St Paul and other New Testament writers and what they have to say to the leaders of the churches they address. Such characteristics serve both to inform and sometimes to rebuke the Church in every age."²⁰ Ten characteristics were noted:
- a. All leadership is service;
 - b. Leaders are not self-appointed;
 - c. Leadership is frequently shared;
 - d. Leaders are called to hold before the Church the nature of its calling and stimulate it to be faithful to it;
 - e. In that context, leaders are not afraid to say unpalatable things;
 - f. Leaders are to have a particular concern for the vulnerable;
 - g. Leaders help the local community to see itself in a wider church context;
 - h. Leaders are role models;
 - i. Leadership is not concerned only with the internal life of the Church and the lives of its members. It is leadership in mission;
 - j. The image of the shepherd is often used, pointing to key activities of leadership (guiding, feeding, protecting and supporting), and underlining the qualities demanded of such leadership, above all a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the Church and a willingness to deny oneself in its service. Above all, the language of shepherding is a constant reminder that all leaders are to model themselves on, and be answerable to, Jesus the Chief Shepherd.

¹⁹ *The Nature of Oversight*, 2005, 1.13

²⁰ *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference*, 2010, section 3.3

5.9. From this survey of leadership characteristics, the report concluded that:

“Such characteristics serve as an inspiration and challenge for all leadership in the Church, wherever it is exercised. They are as relevant to the service of church stewards and class leaders, circuit stewards and district officers, as they are to presbyters and deacons. They suggest the qualities for which we should look in selecting those who are to serve as the Church’s senior officers, whatever the particular focus of their responsibilities.”²¹

5.10. The moral character of any leader matters, and how they exercise leadership is important not just for its impact on others but also because it must inspire trust and confidence. Discernment is vital, and there are questions to be further explored about how to discern the presence of appropriate gifts for servant leadership in the people who offer themselves for it in all parts of the life of the Methodist Church, and about how leaders are equipped, supported and held accountable.

6. Matters of faith and order arising from the work on Oversight and Trusteeship

6.1. The 2022 Conference will consider a variety of proposed changes to the structure and ways of working of the Methodist Church. There are some matters for decision, and some areas where work is continuing. The Faith and Order Committee notes that there are several matters of faith and order that require further attention, and draws these to the attention of the Conference.

6.2. Direct reporting to the Conference

Under the proposals before the Conference a new, reconstituted Connexional Council will become the trustee body of the Methodist Church. Most connexional work will be undertaken by three committees that will primarily report to the Connexional Council. The Faith and Order Committee notes the significance of the word ‘primarily’ because all committees, from time to time, may raise questions of oversight, doctrine or other matters that more appropriately should be addressed by the Conference. It is already acknowledged that it would not be appropriate for those aspects of the work of the Ministries Committee that relate to the oversight of presbyters and deacons to be the responsibility of the new Connexional Council (including, for example, decisions about candidates, student ministers, probationers, ordinations, authorisations to preside, and the stationing of ministers). The Faith and Order Committee emphasises that such aspects of oversight properly belong to the Conference and cannot be transferred to another body without infringing the plenary oversight of the Conference. Further work is needed, however, so that the means by which such matters are directly reported to the Conference becomes clear and the appropriate role of the Connexional Council in this respect is clearly defined. For example, on some matters it will be appropriate for the Connexional Council to scrutinize in detail and comment on reports from bodies that report directly to the Conference, but on other matters it will not.

6.3. The oversight responsibilities of the Connexional Council

It is intended that the Connexional Council be given responsibilities broader than that of a trustee body but there is not yet clarity regarding the particular oversight responsibilities that it will have by delegation from the Conference, nor has there been consideration of which responsibilities appropriately belong elsewhere. This is an important aspect of the questions about which bodies report directly to the Conference. At present it is suggested that apart from the Connexional Council only the Faith and Order, Law and Polity, Safeguarding and Conference Business

²¹ *Leading and Presiding: Developing the Presidency of the Conference*, 2010, 3.3.12

Committee should report to the Conference, but no reasoning for this determination has been given which contains reflection on the nature of oversight. There has also not yet been consideration of the way in which other bodies express the oversight of the Conference, and whether and when it is appropriate for these bodies not to report directly to the Conference (this includes, for example the Conference Diaconal Committee, the Authorisations Committee, the proposed Nominations Committee, and any body that hears appeals and makes decisions on behalf of the Conference in relation to candidates, probationers and general complaints and discipline matters). The proposals for a new structure should include an account of how the oversight of the Conference is being exercised by the different bodies involved and make the lines of accountability clear. The Faith and Order Committee understands and appreciates that this work will be undertaken during the next connexional year, but wishes the Conference to note its importance as it speaks to the theological and ecclesiological self-understanding of the Methodist Church. The Faith and Order Committee further notes that, more broadly, attention needs to be given to how the term 'oversight' is used within Methodist documents because it is both a general and a theological term may potentially lead to confusion.

6.4. Who decides what is on the Conference Agenda?

It may further be the case that, from time to time, the work of all of the three main committees raises matters that are not within the remit of the Connexional Council and should more appropriately be addressed by the Conference. Some attention needs to be given to who decides when this is the case. In many ways the new Connexional Council will act as a gatekeeper for the business that goes to the Conference. In many respects it will be entirely appropriate for the Connexional Council to fulfil this role, but there is also the potential risk that it may act inappropriately in this regard, even if this is not the intention of individual Council members. Therefore it is necessary for there to be some mechanism through which the Conference can determine what needs to be on its agenda. This is also a concern arising from the suggested ways in which the Conference will work in the future. If some decisions may appropriately be allocated to bodies other than the Conference, then there needs to be open and transparent decision-making about which matters go onto the Conference agenda and how these are selected. Some kind of independent scrutiny of these decisions on behalf of the Conference is therefore necessary, and the Faith and Order Committee suggests that recommendations for this are brought to the 2023 Conference. The Committee could envisage two immediate possibilities:

- a. That the role of Conference Elected members of the Conference is expanded so that scrutiny of what is on the Conference agenda becomes part of their role. There would need to be a clear role description and person specification for this role; or, alternatively,
- b. That the Conference Business Committee is reconstituted so that it could take on this role. It would require new Terms of Reference and consideration of the skills, gifts and experience of those who serve on this Committee. Again, person specifications should be drawn up so that the Conference is clear what is needed in the people appointed to this role when it appoints them.

There may be further options, but it is important that the underlying issues are given further attention.

6.5. The Role of the District Chair

The proposals before the Conference regarding the reduction in Districts and new ways of expressing district leadership have implications for the role of the District

Chair in the exercise of oversight. The roles, and potential roles, of Deputy District Chair and Assistant District Chair also warrant further theological attention. Within this work there is a danger that conversations about leadership have failed adequately to consider questions of oversight. Missional leadership and oversight are not easily separated: District Chairs have a particular oversight role of which pastoral oversight is an intrinsic part and not easily separable from other aspects of oversight. The Faith and Order Committee recommends that questions about the oversight role of the District Chair are given urgent attention alongside continuing reflection on District leadership. Such questions are not just about this particular office but relate to the Methodist Church's understanding of ministry and oversight, and are matters of both faith and order. The Committee therefore brings a resolution to ensure that this work is undertaken before further and more permanent decisions are made about the role of the District Chair.

6.6. Connexional Leadership

- 6.6.1. The Faith and Order Committee considers that further work needs to be done on the nature and exercise of oversight in relationship to connexional leadership, including that expressed in the renewed Connexional Leadership Forum. It notes that the Conference has the supreme responsibility for the leadership of the Methodist Church and, whilst retaining overall authority, delegates certain aspects of leadership to other bodies (such as the Methodist Council, District Synods, Circuit Meetings and Church Councils) and to individual office holders who exercise leadership throughout the year in various parts of the connexion. Within the Methodist Church, people are appointed to hold office and exercise leadership by virtue of that office. Some officeholders appointed by the Conference have responsibilities and therefore exercise leadership not only in the setting to which they have been appointed but in the Methodist Church as a whole. These officers are expected to act collegially and to account for their leadership.
- 6.6.2. The oversight and trusteeship report includes an update on the work on a discernment process for senior leadership roles and on the processes by which people are appointed to particular offices and connexional committees (including the proposal for a Nominations Committee). The Faith and Order Committee notes that the *Ministry in the Methodist Church Conference Statement* encourages Methodists, in all areas of Church life, to reflect on how they identify, nurture and encourage people's gifts and on how they support and hold each other accountable in their discernment in relation to ministry: "Discerning the particular tasks, and ways of being, that God is calling us to in the world is a corporate task and individual responses to God's call are shaped within this context."²² Discernment and appointment processes seek to identify gifts and test a call, and also to identify the appropriate people for particular roles taking into consideration how their gifts and expertise will complement those of others.
- 6.6.3. The question of who is involved in any discernment and appointment process is therefore important and it will be vital for there to be clarity about who is making which decisions i.e. to be clear who appoints those who decide. The work on oversight referred to in 6.3 above should also help determine when the Connexional Council can make appointments and when appointments need to be made by the Conference itself.

²² *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 2021, section 4.3

*****RESOLUTIONS**

45/1. The Conference received the Report.

45/2. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to bring a report on the Role of the District Chair to the 2023 Conference.