

Memorials to the Conference

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 made up of representatives from Districts 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 either to agree this reply, to amend it, or to agree an alternative reply [see the Rules of Procedure printed at the beginning of Volume One of the Agenda, Standing Order 133(4)].

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.

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 deadline for which is 12:30pm on Tuesday 9 July, or 4:30pm on the day before the memorial is due to be debated, whichever is earlier. 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.

The Memorials Committee has agreed with the recommendation of the 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, and that the remaining replies should be taken *en bloc*. 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 136(2A)].

Throughout the representative session, the Memorials Secretary, Martin Harker, is available to members of the Conference for consultation on any matter affecting memorials and the procedures described above. For example, if any member wishes to change the recommended reply of the

committee, the Memorials Secretary is willing to advise on how and when to propose either an amendment or the substitution of a different reply.

The Memorials Secretary will also notify each Synod and Circuit of the reply the Conference has made to its memorial.

M1 The Fruitful Field Project

The Oxford (23/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: 28 for; 0 against) has become aware of the considerable volume of concern which has been expressed by Methodist people and by our ecumenical partners, online, in the *Methodist Recorder* and in other forums about the decisions of the 2012 Conference in response to the *Fruitful Field* report.

The Circuit Meeting believes that it is vital that the training of future ministers of the Methodist Church is informed by engagement with the best theological resources in the country, that it reflects the breadth of contemporary Methodism and that it is provided in such a manner as to enhance our ecumenical relationships.

The Circuit Meeting therefore respectfully requests the Conference to review the present position and to determine whether these objectives are being reached.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Oxford Circuit Meeting for its memorial and recognises its concerns in response to *The Fruitful Field Project* report and the Network implementation process.

The 2012 Conference, in accepting Notice of Motion 102: Fruitful Field, affirmed the need to “maintain, develop and promote relationships with university theological departments and the opportunities already available to further Methodist scholarship for the benefit of the whole Church.” A more detailed response to that notice of motion can be found within the *Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network* report to the Conference.

The Conference appreciates the desire for the whole people of God to be informed by engagement with the best theological resources in the country and those that reflect the breadth of contemporary Methodism.

The appointment of regional network staff offers deeper opportunities for the whole people of God to engage with theology and learning in a wide variety of contexts. Connexional ways of working among the network staff team will ensure a culture of collaboration and sharing, and that learning will be disseminated across the Connexion.

The appointment of a Director of Scholarship, Research and Innovation, and the designation of significant funds for this area is a clear sign of the commitment of the Church to encouraging and resourcing a wide breadth of theology. The Network’s virtual learning environment, when fully developed, will enable more people to have access to a breadth of resources not currently accessible to the whole people of God.

The two centres in the Network represent significant theological breadth and excellent resources; both centres also have a wide range of ecumenical relations, and developments in the Common Awards process (see the *Ministries Committee* report) are one way in which ecumenical relations are being greatly enhanced through the Network.

Regional development of work plans for staff of the Network, which will allow for both connexional and contextual learning and development needs to be addressed, will be one of the defining

features of the Network, allowing for regional particularities in ecumenical and inter faith needs to be preserved and enhanced.

The Conference therefore believes that the concerns raised by the memorial are addressed in the *Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network* report.

M2 The Fruitful Field Project

The Northampton District Synod (M) (Present: 83; Voting: 76 for, 2 against) has become aware of the considerable volume of concern which has been expressed by Methodist people and by our ecumenical partners, online, in the *Methodist Recorder* and in other forums about the decisions of the 2012 Conference in response to the *Fruitful Field* report.

The Synod believes that it is vital that the formation of the whole people of God within the Methodist Church is informed by engagement with the best theological resources in the country, that it reflects the breadth of contemporary Methodism and that it is provided in such a manner as to enhance our ecumenical relationships.

The Synod therefore respectfully requests the Conference to review the present position and to determine whether these objectives are being reached.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as M1.

M3 The Fruitful Field Project

The Lincoln and Grimsby District Synod (R) (Present: 83; Voting: 81 for, 2 against) is concerned about some of the implications of the decisions made at the 2012 Conference through the *Fruitful Field* report. As the outcomes of those decisions are now being delivered, this Synod urges the Conference:

- (a) To ensure that existing strong links with academic institutions providing excellence in theological study are maintained and deepened, so that the Methodist Church remains able to inform, and to be informed by, the wider academic world. In particular to ensure that ministers at all stages in ministry have access to academic theological institutions and resources.
- (b) To ensure that the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network takes seriously the need for academic rigour in the training offered.
- (c) To ensure that the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network keeps ecumenical and inter faith connections as a high priority in all training, and in particular develops the existing relationships between Methodist training institutions and those of other Christian denominations and with inter faith study centres.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as M1.

M4 Academic and ecumenical relationships in ministerial training

The Lancashire District Synod (R) (Present: 139; Voting: unanimous) requests the 2013 Conference to so order its business that it may address in full two issues which are of concern to the District.

First, how confident is the Conference that the Church can assuredly withdraw from training in leading universities, internationally recognised not least for the quality of their teaching in theology,

and not expose even a proportion of trainee ministers to the rigours of interdisciplinary living and study?

Second, how confident is the Conference that all necessary steps have been taken to reinvigorate the Methodist Church's relationships with its major ecumenical partners in the light of the 2012 Conference decisions? (The Synod recalls that the Joint Implementation Commission had recommended in its 2008 report that both the Conference and the Church of England General Synod be involved in joint decision-making about the future of the two Churches' theological colleges. Nothing approaching this level of consultation and joint decision-making took place in 2012.)

The Synod requests that in responding to this memorial the Conference offers a vision of the nature of Methodism in the future, which these changes are intended to resource, which will gain the support of the full breadth of the Methodist people.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Lancashire Synod for its memorial, and for drawing to the attention of the Conference the importance of relationships with leading Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and major ecumenical partners.

The April meeting of the Methodist Council received a report (MC/13/38) that included within it an initial response to Notice of Motion 102 (2012), which stated that: 'The Conference directs the Methodist Council to oversee such processes as may be required to maintain, develop and promote relationships with university theological departments and the opportunities already available to further Methodist scholarship for the benefit for the whole Church.' This report, which is available through the Methodist Church's website, sets out the process which has been and is being developed to fulfil this requirement, within the context of the broader work being done to cement the central place of scholarship, research and innovation within the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network and the Church more broadly.

Initial ministerial formation at the Queen's Foundation takes place in a high-quality and ecumenical environment. The practice-based formation pathway is currently under development. The Director of Scholarship, Research and Innovation will play a key role in maintaining our relationships with HEIs as the Network develops. The Conference thanks the Lancashire Synod for its helpful reminder of the rigours of interdisciplinary living and study.

The Conference has affirmed repeatedly the importance of ecumenical relationships. The Ministries Committee, in its report to the 2013 Conference, noted the significant progress that has been made in developing the partnership between the Methodist Church and the Church of England in relation to the Common Awards being developed by Durham University. Agreement concerning the Common Awards provides a tangible expression of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant and a significant opportunity to enhance shared work. Further information can be found in the Ministries Committee report to the Conference. The Conference however regrets that joint decision-making with the Church of England as recommended by the Joint Implementation Committee was not undertaken in the Fruitful Field process.

The 2012 Conference, in receiving *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the Conference, noted the sustained ecumenical vision of the Queen's Foundation and the 'diverse student body [at Cliff College], including within it students from the Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Nazarene, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic traditions, and from the Assemblies of God, the Salvation Army, and a number of community churches and independent free churches' (para 240.4).

The continued commitment to ecumenical working is further expressed in the responsibilities of the new Directors of Learning and Development, and clearly in the role of the regional coordinators who are tasked to develop and maintain wherever possible good and collaborative working relationships with ecumenical colleagues and other training providers within the region.

The Conference believes that the *General Secretary's Reports* to the Conferences of 2011, 2012 and 2013 set out a vision of the nature of Methodism in the future, and that the creation of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network will assist the Church in achieving that vision.

The Conference believes that the concerns raised in the memorial are addressed in the *Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network* report and the *General Secretary's Report*. The further reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to these reports.

M5 Ecumenical relationships in ministerial training

Wesley's Chapel works extremely closely with other churches and is totally committed to the ecumenical agenda. The City Road (35/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 23; Voting: unanimous) regrets, therefore, the decision of the Plymouth Conference to end ministerial training in Durham and Cambridge and to withdraw from the mature ecumenical arrangements in these places. We find it difficult to explain these decisions to our brothers and sisters in the other churches we work with.

Therefore, we urge the Conference:

- (a) to furnish the Methodist people with an explanation of the discussions which took place with our ecumenical partners in Durham and Cambridge before last year's decisions were taken; and
- (b) to inform the Methodist people what steps are being taken to repair the reputational damage which has been the consequence of those decisions.

Reply

The Conference thanks the City Road Circuit Meeting for its memorial and recognises its concerns about the decisions made at the 2012 Conference in relation to initial ministerial formation at the Wesley Study Centre, Durham and Wesley House, Cambridge.

In answer to point (a) the Conference would like to assure the Circuit that conversations took place at both of these institutions last year prior to the recommendations made by the Ministries Committee to the 2012 Conference and refers the Circuit to paragraphs 34 and 35 of *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference.

Consultation documents were sent to a wide variety of ecumenical partners and offers were made to hold additional conversations.

Submissions were received from representatives of a range of bodies, including the College of Preachers, the Ecumenical Stakeholders Forum, the Arthur Rank Centre, the Church of England Bishops of the West Midlands Region, Cranmer Hall, Durham, Anglia Ruskin University, the Cambridge Theological Federation, the University of Cambridge, St John's College, Durham University, and the Education and Learning Committee of the United Reformed Church. All submissions were seen by the Ministries Committee, subject to the scrutiny of the Revd Dr Brian Beck and the Revd Alison Tomlin as detailed in paragraph 40 of *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference.

Subsequently, individual conversations were held with all those organisations who requested them. Further conversations have continued this year between members of the Ministries Committee,

members of the Implementation Executive and representatives of the Wesley Study Centre and Wesley House.

To ensure constructive ecumenical relationships and in response to point (b) the ecumenical relationships at Durham and Cambridge do not depend on these being places where initial ministerial formation takes place, and discussions are in place between the Ministries Committee and the Implementation Executive, and the Trustees of Wesley House, Cambridge and the Management Committee at the Wesley Study Centre, Durham about ways in which these institutions may contribute to the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network.

The Methodist Church is working closely as a partner with the Church of England to deliver the Common Awards validated by the University of Durham (see the *Ministries Committee* report).

The Conference wishes to reassure the City Road Circuit Meeting that ecumenical relationships continue to be of the highest priority in the work of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network and will remain a key focus of the ongoing work of the Network.

The Conference does not believe that further action, beyond that contained in the *Ministries Committee* and *Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network* reports, is needed at this time.

M6 Configuration of initial ministerial training

The Darlington District Synod (R) (Present: 104; Voting: 83 for, 3 against) draws attention to the contents of the report MC/13/38 to the April 2013 Methodist Council on the implementation of the recommendations of *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the Conference of 2012, from which it is clear that some of the key objectives set out in *The Fruitful Field Project* and adopted by the Conference will not be achieved. Specifically:

- There will not be a unified staff team for the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network because tutors at the Queen's Foundation will not be employed as part of the Network.
- The control of Methodist training at the Queen's Foundation will continue to be indirect, because its existing governance structure will remain in place.
- Cliff College will also continue to employ its own staff and (as originally envisaged) will not offer initial ministerial training.
- In consequence, there will be no single Network and no centre under direct Methodist control which provides initial ministerial training.

It is the Synod's understanding that the advantages intended to flow from the substantial dismantling of existing ministerial training arrangements and their replacement by the proposed Network arrangements therefore cannot be achieved. This calls into doubt the assessment that the adverse consequences of such dismantling, which were noted in *The Fruitful Field Project*, are a price worth paying for those advantages.

The Synod therefore requests the Conference to set up an urgent review to reconsider the issue of how ministerial training should be configured with the aim of establishing an alternative, robust configuration for Methodist ministerial training, building on existing strengths and partnerships, rather than by dismantling them.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Darlington Synod for its memorial and notes the Synod's concerns.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, to initiate an appropriate process through which a review of ministerial training is conducted in line with the request of the memorial, to ensure that the vision outlined by the Ministries Committee in the *Fruitful Field Project* is delivered.

The Conference directs the Council to bring a report to the 2014 Conference.

M7 Local Preachers on trial

The Glossop (19/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 22; Voting: unanimous) suggests to the Conference that the title 'Local Preacher on trial' is outdated and ambiguous and asks the Conference to find a name that more appropriately reflects the nature of the role, for example, 'Preacher in Training' or 'Student Preacher'.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Glossop Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The development of new flexible and accessible pathways for Local Preachers (as outlined in *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference) will provide the best opportunity to reconsider the title 'Local Preacher on Trial'. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to continue to oversee work on the development of these new pathways. The pathways are currently being developed within the framework of existing Standing Orders (including terminology); however, the Conference acknowledges that it would be appropriate to revisit these Standing Orders in the future in the light of this work. The Conference therefore refers this memorial to the Ministries Committee to consider as part of their work on Local Preacher training and directs the committee to report back to the Conference no later than 2015.

M8 Responsibilities of Worship Leaders

The Sheffield (West) (25/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 21; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the current situation relating to Worship Leaders and their relationships with presbyters and Local Preachers and asks the Conference to take the following actions:

- (a) To review the responsibility of Worship leaders within Methodist worship, taking into account the variety of gifts now offered by Worship Leaders and the considerable variety of patterns of worship in current Methodist practice and to provide guidance as to the Worship Leader's relationship to and with the planned presbyter or Local Preacher.
- (b) To review the membership, agenda and title of the Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting to include Worship Leaders as members of that meeting and to enable them to participate in and to vote on appropriate parts of the agenda.
- (c) To revise Standing Orders as necessary.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sheffield (West) Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for raising the issue of the responsibilities and relationships of Worship Leaders.

Since the introduction of Worship Leaders, their role has changed. We believe that the new pathways for Local Preachers and Worship Leaders that are currently under development will reflect these changes, including a "greater emphasis on the skills required for preaching and leading worship" (*The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference, para 134).

As noted in *The Fruitful Field Project* report, the new pathways will present an opportunity for far greater shared training and development for Local Preachers and Worship Leaders. These pathways are currently being developed within the framework of existing Standing Orders (including the responsibilities of Worship Leaders and the constitution of the Local Preachers' Meeting); however, the Conference acknowledges that it would be appropriate to revisit these Standing Orders in the future in the light of this work. This may include a review of the membership, agenda and title of the Local Preachers' Meeting. The Conference notes that many Circuits already invite Worship Leaders to be present and participate at Local Preachers' Meetings. The Conference therefore refers this memorial to the Ministries Committee to consider as part of their work on worship leader training and directs the committee to report back to the Conference no later than 2015.

M9 Length of appointment for worship leaders

The Gordano Valley (7/15) Circuit Meeting (Present: 33; Voting: 24 for, 6 against) draws the Conference's attention to the three-yearly appointments of Worship Leaders by local churches and asks the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee and/or the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster to review this period taking into consideration the lifetime admission of Local Preachers to their office.

There has been growing participation of Worship Leaders in the conduct of worship over the last 20 years. The 2012 report to the Conference, *The Fruitful Field Project*, acknowledged that "Local Preachers and Worship Leaders make an immense contribution to the life of the Connexion".

It is the view of this Circuit Meeting that this level of acceptance is not reflected in the requirement for a three year review of a Worship Leader's appointment.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Gordano Valley Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for raising the issue of the term of service of Worship Leaders between reviews.

As noted in *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference, flexible and accessible pathways are currently being developed under the oversight of the Ministries Committee for Local Preachers and Worship Leaders. These pathways are currently being developed within the framework of existing Standing Orders; however, the Conference acknowledges that it would be appropriate to revisit these Standing Orders in the future in the light of this work. The Conference is grateful for the feedback of the Gordano Valley Circuit Meeting in this process, and acknowledges that in revisiting Standing Orders it would be helpful to reconsider the period of time between reviews. The Conference therefore refers this memorial to the Ministries Committee to consider as part of their work on Worship Leader training and directs the committee to report back to the Conference no later than 2015.

M10 District assessments

The Epworth and Scunthorpe (17/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 46; Voting: unanimous) expresses its concern over the increasingly disproportionate levels of connexional assessments to Districts, which in turn places an increasing burden on Circuits. In a time of economic hardship, decisions taken by the Conference which result in assessment increases by the Connexion need to be rigorously examined. The Circuit Meeting calls upon the Conference not to agree to any initiatives in the next five years that will result in assessment increases that are beyond an inflation uplift.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Epworth and Scunthorpe Circuit Meeting for raising the important issue of the levels of assessment on all parts of the Connexion. It notes that as part of its business this year the Conference will be asked to adopt a formula to be used to calculate the total assessment to the Methodist Church Fund for the three years commencing 1 September 2014. Within the *Connexional Central Services Budget*, the Conference was presented with three different options so that it could consider this point carefully, taking account of all of the challenges of reflecting a generous God within times of economic uncertainty.

The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the *Connexional Central Services Budget*.

M11 District assessments

The Lincoln and Grimsby District Synod (R) (Present: 82; Voting: 78 for, 4 against) believes that if churches and Circuits are to be meaningful in their delivery of a discipleship movement shaped for mission then resourcing them in as appropriate a way as is possible at the local level is vital.

Presently 90% of the district assessment in the Lincoln and Grimsby District is sent on to the Connexion, leaving very limited scope for mission to be conducted contextually. When churches and Circuits are unable to fund mission projects and undertake ministry in ways that are best determined by those responsible for their delivery they are rendered ineffective.

We the Lincoln and Grimsby Synod therefore call on the Conference to limit the Connexional Assessment to an inflation uplift for the next five years and to find ways of easing the burden on rural Districts that comprise small congregations with an ageing membership.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Lincoln and Grimsby Synod for reminding it of the importance of using the Church's resources effectively as it continually seeks to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

The Conference has previously stated that the annual increase in the total Methodist Church Fund (MCF) assessment should be the prevailing rate of inflation. The Conference notes that as part of its business this year it has adopted a formula to be used to calculate the total assessment to the Methodist Church Fund for the three years commencing 1 September 2014. Within the *Connexional Central Services Budget*, the Conference will be presented with three different options so that it can consider this point carefully, taking account of all of the challenges of reflecting a generous God within times of economic uncertainty.

The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the *Connexional Central Services Budget*.

M12 Connexional Central Services Budget and district assessments

Aware of the difficulties caused by the continuing economic situation, the Lancashire District Synod (R) (Present: 136; Voting: 134 for, 1 against) requests that the Conference directs those producing the Connexional Central Services Budget for future years to recognise the difficulties faced by Circuits and churches and so to mirror in the Connexion the economies being made at local level:

Firstly by looking at the budget itself:

- (a) For the whole of the next triennial beginning 2013/14 the Connexional Central Services Budget should remain fixed at the 2013/14 level in cash terms.

- (b) The cost of any new undertaking should be met from the fixed budget to ensure that the proposal is prioritised and that all available resources are efficiently used.
- (c) Any notice of motion at the Conference will have its financial implications laid out so that the Conference knows when making a decision the full amount of any cost.

Secondly in looking at the means of apportioning the assessment, to ensure that:

- (a) any new formula to be presented to the Conference is equitable and provides clearly defined arrangements to bring all Districts to target as quickly as possible.
- (b) any new formula ensures that there will be no significant changes from one year to the next, except where they can be explained by factors which are known to have changed.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Lancashire Synod for reminding it of the impact on Circuits and churches of the level of Methodist Church Fund (MCF) assessment.

It notes that as part of its business this year the Conference will be asked to adopt a formula to be used to calculate the total assessment to the Methodist Church Fund for the three years commencing 1 September 2014. Within the *Connexional Central Services Budget*, the Conference will be presented with three different options so that it might consider this point carefully, taking account of all of the challenges of reflecting a generous God within times of economic uncertainty.

The Conference fully supports the proposal that any notice of motion should have its financial implications laid out when it is presented, and a new pro forma is to be used during the 2013 Conference for the first time that is designed to capture this information. This will better enable the Conference Financial Committee to provide advice on the potential budgetary impact of such notices of motion before they are debated.

The Conference believes that the current method by which the total assessment is apportioned is equitable. The share per District is based on a combination of the number of ministers and lay employees within each District, taking account of part-time posts. There have been several attempts to use data regarding regional living standards to adjust the figures, but these have now been removed having been felt by the majority of Districts to have the effect of making the apportionment inequitable.

Because the MCF assessment is apportioned between all 31 Districts, changes in any one District affect all of the others. Once the changes in all Districts are combined, there can be significant shifts in the level required by each District, and the impact on any one District is impossible to predict.

District Treasurers represent their Districts at an annual practitioners' forum that discusses the apportionment for the following year before any figures are agreed or released to Circuits. The overwhelming consensus of the Treasurers has been that stability from year to year is highly valued. As a result, changes have been restricted to agreed amounts, avoiding large swings from one year to the next.

The reply to the first two parts of this memorial is contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the *Connexional Central Services Budget* report. The Conference believes that the aims of the remaining parts of this memorial have already been achieved, and so no further action is required.

M13 Financial demands upon Circuits

The Sleaford (17/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: 28 for, 0 against) is concerned at the additional financial demands upon the Circuits as a result of Conference decisions, especially the

requirement for Districts to employ paid Safeguarding Officers and the maintaining of the final salary pension scheme. It asks the Conference to recognise that, with ageing congregations, Circuits cannot be expected to cope with major increases in expenditure of this sort.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Sleaford Circuit Meeting for raising the important issue of the levels of assessment on all parts of the Church. It notes that as part of its business this year it has adopted a formula to be used to calculate the total assessment to the Methodist Church Fund for the three years commencing 1 September 2014. Within the *Connexional Central Services Budget*, the Conference was presented with three different options so that it could consider this point carefully, taking account of all of the challenges of reflecting a generous God within times of economic uncertainty.

The Conference also acknowledges that difficult choices have to be made regarding the use of finite resources both connexionally and more locally, such as at district level. On the specific examples given, it continues to believe that a defined benefit pension scheme is the most effective way of reflecting the covenant relationship between the Church and its ministers and for the Methodist Council to assist its lay employees in preparing for their retirement. The impact on Circuits and the connexional budget has been mitigated by the decision of the Conference of 2009 to establish a Pension Reserve Fund which is now contributing £1 million per annum to the ministers' pension scheme, and if needed would support the lay employees' scheme. This would otherwise have had to be paid by Circuits. In addition, the Conference has considered a proposal for the remaining increase to be shared between the Church and ministers.

Creating Safer Space is a vital prerequisite to the Church's ability to fulfil God's mission effectively. The minimum requirement for Districts to provide an average of 14 hours per week of District Safeguarding Officer capacity arose from a President's Inquiry into the case of a lay employee who was convicted of child abuse crimes whilst working for the Church. This was a key learning point from that inquiry and from the need for increasingly professional support for safeguarding across the Church. The report to the 2012 Conference was clear that this does not automatically have to be a paid post, but acknowledged that providing such skills and time on a voluntary basis was unlikely to be possible in most cases. It is for each District Policy Committee to agree their own budget, providing them with the flexibility to decide whether to treat this as an additional expense or to cease other commitments in order to absorb the District Safeguarding Officer costs within existing budgets.

M14 Ministerial stipends

The Bede (20/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 62; Voting: 57 for, 0 against), conscious of the continuing economic downturn and its effects upon the income of those who give to support the Church, asks the Conference to freeze ministerial stipends for one year, in line with many of our members whose incomes have gone down in real terms.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bede Circuit Meeting for its memorial and assures the Circuit that its concerns leading to the request to freeze the stipend review for one year are heard, as were similar memorials last year.

The Conference of 2012 adopted the recommendations of the Connexional Allowances Committee with respect to determining the stipend review for the period 2012 to 2015, with reasons set out in the 2012 Conference Agenda pp124-126. It was argued that if stipend increases, calculated in line with general wage and consumer price movements, are withheld, then stipends slip behind and at

some future date (as happened three times between 1996 and 2003, when the present review principle was introduced), a more radical upward adjustment has to be made. It is underlined that the increase now recommended is based on average economic data, accepting that changes in individuals' and families' income can be greater or less: such is the nature of an average.

Moreover, it is also important to note that income levels for many people advanced considerably more quickly than did stipends during the many years of greater economic prosperity: Circuits expressed no discontent with this at the time and it is too easily forgotten. The Conference has now established the principle that it is in the whole Church's interests to ensure fair and steady year-on-year stipend adjustments.

The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the *Connexional Allowances Committee* report.

M15 Releasing money for God's mission

The Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District Synod (R) (Present: 131; Voting: 127 for, 4 against), mindful of the warnings found in Matthew 25:14-30 and Acts 5: 1-6, and enthused by the *General Secretary's Reports* to the Conferences of 2011 and 2012, with their call to reshaping for mission, renewing focus on being in connexion and to the responsible use of resources, believes it desirable to increase openness and transparency regarding monies held within church and circuit funds. Such transparency will help to create confidence in the Circuits within the Connexion in their ability to engage in ongoing ministry, mission and growth.

The Synod notes that every church is already required to submit a standard form of accounts, together with a reserves policy, for circuit approval annually by 31 March 31. The Synod therefore believes that the information thus obtained should be made good use of by the following means:

- (a) Circuits should compile in one document a list of all the funds, however described and wherever held, and reasonable, agreed reserves of each church in the Circuit, and present it to the Circuit Meeting. This will make transparent to the meeting the funds available for ministry, mission and growth in the Circuit and help to dispel the myth that there is insufficient money to engage in new work.
- (b) A conversation should be held annually between appropriate people in each church and the Circuit, prior to 31 August to develop and plan for the ways in which funds that are in excess of such reasonable, agreed reserves may be used for ministry, mission and growth in the Circuit (or local mission area in a large Circuit). Details of such plans, accompanied by the aforementioned circuit document and the circuit accounts, should be submitted annually to the District Policy Committee, or equivalent, by 31 December of the same year. This will enable Districts better to fulfil the requirements of Standing Order 955(7) to fund mission initiatives across the District.

The Synod urges the Conference to enact, as soon as possible, such procedures as would give effect to this memorial, thereby giving greater effect to the responsible use of resources across the Connexion.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent Synod for highlighting the need for churches, Circuits and Districts to ensure that the funds that they hold are maximised for use in God's mission. It reminds District Policy Committees of their responsibility under Standing Order 955(7) to review the state of Model Trust funds held by each Circuit at least every three years and to propose to Circuit Meetings that they transfer money to support projects elsewhere within the District.

The Conference also reminds trustees of all Methodist money that it should be held in accordance with regularly reviewed reserves policies, which should ensure that trustees do not allow their reserves to be inappropriately high.

Each church is required to submit its annual accounts to the Circuit Treasurer and each Circuit to the relevant District Treasurer. There are no rules which prevent Circuit Treasurers from compiling a summary of the funds held by each church in the Circuit and forwarding them to District Treasurers, or for District Policy Committees to request such information. Such a practice may be seen as embodying the Methodist Church's connexional nature.

However, the Conference also recognises that a coherent approach across the Connexion may be of maximum impact in releasing money for mission so it instructs the Methodist Council to form a working party to consider the issues raised by memorials M15, M16 and M17 and to report back to the Conference no later than 2015.

M16 Releasing money for God's mission

The Birmingham District Synod (R) (Present: 121; Voting: 112 for, 4 against) has taken notice of the 2011 and 2012 *General Secretary's Reports* to Conference and believes it is desirable to increase openness and transparency regarding the funds held within individual churches and Circuits. Such transparency will help to create confidence in the Circuits within the Connexion in their ability to engage in ongoing ministry, mission and growth.

The Synod notes that every church is already required to submit a standard form of accounts, together with a reserves policy, for circuit approval annually by 31 March. The Synod therefore believes that the information contained in these accounts should be used as follows:

- (a) Circuits should compile, and disclose annually to the Circuit Meeting, a schedule showing a list of all the funds held, however described, and the amount of reserves (and the reserve policy) of each church in the Circuit. This will assist the Circuit Meeting in using the funds available for ministry, mission and growth in the Circuit.
- (b) These Circuit schedules should be submitted annually to the District Policy Committee, or equivalent, by 31 December of the same year. This will enable Districts better to fulfil the requirements of Standing Order 955(7) to fund mission initiatives across the District.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as M15.

M17 Releasing money for God's mission

The York and Hull District Synod (R) (Present: 93; Voting: 81 for, 12 against) requests that consideration be given by the Methodist Council to enabling and encouraging the principle of releasing unallocated monies from unrestricted funds held by churches, Circuits and Districts for the purpose of encouraging mission within the respective Districts. This would be an expression of common commitment to sharing in God's mission and in line with biblical imperatives (remember the servant who buried his master's treasure). In accordance with our teaching, the Methodist Council is also asked to consider ways in which the Church is enabled to enter into a deep and meaningful conversation on the way in which it uses its future financial resources at all levels.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as M15.

M18 Definition of replacement projects

The Liverpool District Synod (R) (Present: 85; Voting: 82 for, 0 against) requests the Conference to instruct the Connexional Grants Committee to revise the criteria to be applied by the appropriate connexional authority (The Connexional Team) in deciding whether or not to classify a project as a replacement project to accurately reflect the directive from the 2011 Conference in reply to M24 and M25, compliant with the plain meaning of Standing Order 973, to allow for the proceeds of multiple dispositions to be included in a single replacement project without attracting the connexional levy to be applicable not only to churches, but also to manses, and also that these revised criteria be applied to schemes submitted since the 1 September 2011.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Liverpool Synod for its memorial.

The 2011 Conference accepted memorials M24 and M25, the consequence of which was to change the interpretation of Standing Order 973 to allow for the proceeds of multiple dispositions to be included in a single replacement project without attracting the CPF Levy.

The matters raised in this memorial have already been raised with the Connexional Team by the Sankey Valley Circuit in the Liverpool District and the Connexional Grants Committee are in the process of amending the guidelines to ensure they are in line with the reply of the 2011 Conference to memorials M24 and M25.

The Conference is confident that the work requested by the Liverpool Synod is already in the process of being completed and therefore judges that no additional action is required.

M19 Definition of replacement projects

The North East Somerset and Bath (7/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 49; Voting: unanimous) requests the Conference to review the principles under which a levy upon the proceeds of sale of a property are made under Standing Order 973 and to broaden the definition of 'replacement scheme' to include new ventures in mission that may not involve buildings, thereby releasing resources for new models of mission.

The Circuit Meeting recognises that their memorial M17 (2012) to the Conference of 2012 was declined by the Conference but are concerned that this was solely on the grounds of the potential impact on the amount of money that would then be available to the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF). It appears that no consideration was given to the major point of principle that the present arrangements involve a bias towards projects involving new or renewed buildings over against those where churches seek to develop new patterns of church life which do not involve developing their own buildings. The Circuit Meeting again requests the Conference to review the principle that Methodism, as a discipleship movement shaped for mission and as a Church encouraging fresh expressions of church, should give increased resources to work that involves new patterns of church life over against those which relate solely to the replacement of existing buildings.

Whilst the Circuit Meeting recognises that new ventures in mission may themselves attract money from the CPF there is no certainty, when planning future policy, under present Standing Orders that this would be forthcoming.

Reply

The Conference thanks the North East Somerset and Bath Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The Conference has received a number of memorials which seek to expand the definition of replacement projects under Standing Order 973. It is important to consider any amendment to the definition of replacement projects alongside the level of income to the Connexional Priority Fund and commitments of the Connexional Priority Fund.

The 2011 Conference expanded the interpretation of replacement projects to allow for multiple dispositions to not attract the CPF levy and the Methodist Council considered the impact of these amendments in the papers MC/11/20 and MC/11/45. Prior to any further amendments to the definition of replacement projects the Conference considers it appropriate for a full review to be undertaken into the application of the CPF levy and the exemptions and the income from the levy since 2011.

The Conference therefore accepts the request for a review of this policy and directs the Council to undertake a full review of the CPF levy policy and report no later than the 2015 Conference with proposals for any amendments to the policy.

M20 Fresh expressions and the Connexional Priority Fund levy

The Truro (12/4) Circuit Meeting (Present: 39; Voting: unanimous) enthusiastically endorses the challenge of the General Secretary of the Methodist Church (in his report to the Conference of 2011) that we should seek to become again 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission'.

In 2008, the Conference encouraged every Circuit to note the Faith and Order paper on *The Missional Nature of the Circuit* which included a recognition that the "constant reflection on, and reaction to the mission of God in the world will mean that the role and identity of the circuit will need to be flexible and fluid" [paragraph 5.6].

The Truro Circuit Meeting believes that part of the response to this challenge will be through the imaginative development of missional expressions and new forms of church. In recent years, many such projects have been referred to as 'Fresh Expressions' and (almost by definition) require holy risk-taking if they are to take root and produce the hoped-for fruit of the Kingdom.

We believe that the Conference will therefore wish to minimise disincentives to the development of such projects, and encourage imaginative and flexible responses to the mission challenges facing the Methodist Church today.

The Truro Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to encourage innovative mission and ministry by:

- (a) drawing up clear and measurable criteria by which a project or initiative might become designated as a 'Fresh Expression' within the Methodist Church;
- (b) recording such projects and Circuits on a central list (similar to that held for City Centre Churches), thus encouraging mutual support, encouragement and the sharing of good practice;
- (c) agreeing that money to be used in the establishment and conduct of a designated Fresh Expression be treated in the same way as a 'replacement project', even if property is not to be purchased for it;
- (d) determining that should such projects at their close involve the sale of buildings, that they be exempted from the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) levy; and
- (e) initiating a review of the current uses of CPF income, to ensure the affordability of the above measures.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Truro Circuit Meeting for its memorial. It notes the suggestions made in points (a) and (b) of the memorial regarding criteria for designating and a process for recording fresh

expressions of church. Recognising that both of these suggestions are to some measure addressed by the existing annual reporting process of statistics for mission, the Conference nevertheless directs the Methodist Council to explore the desirability and feasibility of developing more detailed guidelines for fresh expressions and to report to the Conference no later than 2015.

The Conference has also directed the Methodist Council to undertake a review of the CPF levy policy in reply to memorial M19. In light of this review, the Conference refers points (c), (d) and (e) of the memorial to the Council for consideration as part of that review.

M21 Exemption from the Connexional Priority Fund levy

The Truro (12/4) Circuit Meeting (Present: 39; Voting: unanimous) draws to the attention of the Conference what we consider to be an unjust application of Standing Orders 970 and 972 and requests that the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) levy should be refunded in these circumstances. Our case is based on the following facts:

- In 2008 the Circuit introduced a Fresh Expressions project on the Roseland Peninsula in Cornwall. This was to be for a fixed five year period with the Circuit meeting the cost of a presbyter, housing and associated expenses.
- We intended to rent a suitable house for five years but could not find one. Therefore, we bought a manse for £285,000 and then spent a further £50,000 on improvements and £5,000 on fees. This was in the full knowledge that we would need to sell the property after five years.
- After three years the presbyter appointed to the project left the Circuit to take up a role in the Connexional Team in London.
- The Circuit Meeting decided not to reappoint but instead to continue some of the work on a different basis using ministerial input (both ordained and lay) from elsewhere in the Circuit.
- The direct costs of the project (excluding housing) up to that point had amounted to £120,000 to which the Cornwall District had provided a grant of £10,000.
- The manse became redundant at short notice and was put on the market as soon as the presbyter moved out in September 2011. The asking price was £295,000 but it took 14 months to sell and the price had dropped to £268,000. The net income after fees was £257,000.
- The total cost to the Circuit of stipend, expenses and housing came to approximately £190,000 for this Fresh Expressions Project which has had to be managed differently after only three years.
- In addition, under the terms of Standing Orders 970 and 972, we have paid a CPF levy of £83,000. This is in respect of a house that we bought after an extensive search for somewhere to rent, knowing that we would want to sell in five years but, in the event, we tried to sell after three years.
- The total cost of this project was therefore £276,000. (Stipend and expenses £110,000, loss on sale of house and fees £83,000, CPF levy £83,000.)
- We consider that the Roseland Fresh Expressions Project is an example of the 'light touch' flexible ministry that we are encouraged to adopt but now feel that
 - we are being penalised for our creative missional endeavours in the past, and
 - discouraged from taking similar steps in the future.
- We understand fully the principle of redistribution of resources on the realisation of assets that underpins the CPF levy. However we respectfully suggest that the Truro Circuit had previously realised and released considerable assets to allow the Fresh Expression project to happen in the first place instead of leaving those resources unused and 'safe'.
- We cannot believe that Conference envisaged that Standing Orders 970 and 972 would be applied in this way and that there should be scope for flexibility.
- We, therefore, request that the Conference notes the exceptional circumstances relating to this payment of the CPF levy and agrees to the refund of the levy to the Truro Circuit Advance Fund, for mission use.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Truro Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The existing policy for the application of the CPF levy only provides for an exemption from the application of the levy where there is a replacement project.

The 2012 Conference was asked in memorial M17 to expand the definition of replacement projects to include mission projects not involving a building. The Conference declined this memorial on the basis that the definition of replacement projects had been widened in 2011.

The existing policy for the application of the CPF levy does not permit the Conference to grant exceptions to the application of the levy and the Conference therefore declines the memorial.

However, the Conference notes that it has directed a review of the CPF levy policy to be undertaken by the Methodist Council in its reply to memorial M19.

M22 Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod (R) (Present: 116; Voting: unanimous) notes the imminent increases in rent for those ministers and their families relying on Methodist Ministers' Housing Society homes for their retirement. It acknowledges that as a charity, the MMHS has to meet the actual costs of providing retirement homes for those who qualify, and that to do so it must guarantee an income that meets its costs going forward.

At the same time, the District understands that the increases have caused and will continue to cause alarm and distress for many of the ministers and their families who have not been able to provide their own accommodation and have served the Church with a level of stipend that has not allowed them to save sufficiently to meet the level of rental increases being introduced.

For a large number of these ministers, the outlook is that within a short time they could be faced with not being able to afford the rental for their retirement home, and the solution that has been suggested by the MMHS at its consultations is that they should apply to the Benefits System in order to find any shortfall.

This District Synod understands why the MMHS has to balance its books and offers no criticism of that principle. At the same time, the Synod believes it to be unacceptable that faithful servants of the Church should be placed in a position whereby their only means of retaining their home is by relying on state handouts, and that to allow this to happen could be construed as a signal that once ministers retire from the active work the Methodist Church has no further responsibility or pastoral concern.

Given that the MMHS is an independent charity and the Methodist Conference has no legal responsibility or influence on the Society's management, the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod asks the Conference to set up a working party to:

- (a) examine the actual effect of the increases of rent on those who need a Society property to retire to and determine whether or not there will be any who will have to rely on the Benefits System;
- (b) explore ways in which the Methodist people themselves can support the Society's work financially in order to:
 - (i) help retired ministers and their families avoid having to claim benefits to meet their rents,

- (ii) show compassion and pastoral care to those who are needy and are afraid of losing their sense of independence and dignity as a result of their continuing faithfulness to the Church and the past limitations of their stipends whilst in service; and
- (c) report to the Conference of 2014.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Synod for highlighting the importance of caring for all its ministers.

It commends the MMHS board for the way that the charity has provided affordable housing for supernumerary ministers and their spouses for over 40 years. It also recognises that difficult decisions have had to be taken in order to ensure that such provision can continue in the future.

The MMHS board has incorporated into the formula that will be used to determine rent increases a factor that relates to donations to the Society, so all Methodists that choose to make donations to it can be sure that they will have an impact on minimising annual rent increases.

Within its report to the Conference, the Connexional Allowances Committee (CAC) explains that the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons is the connexional fund that it administers to assist all ministers facing hardship. The CAC report outlines several changes to its policy of grant making in response to the increases in MMHS rents, specifically to enable it to offer support where it is most needed. It invites grant applications from supernumeraries and dependants when they face necessary expenditure which they can ill afford. The ability of the CAC to respond to these needs is influenced by the level of income received. The Conference therefore declines the memorial, believing that this issue has been dealt with appropriately elsewhere within its Agenda, but also encourages the Methodist people to donate to MMHS and to continue making donations to the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons so that it can be used to assist all ministers that are in need, whether active or supernumerary.

M23 Condition of manses

The Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod (R) (Present: 183; Voting: 176 for, 1 against) is grateful for the hard work put in by Circuits to keep manses in good order. We recognise that this is a partnership and acknowledge the part that ministers play in making sure that the manse is an appropriate home for them and their successor.

Aware, however, that a small number of ministers leave the manse in a condition which requires the Circuit to spend considerable money on cleaning and making good where the property has been abused, it requests the Conference to address this issue and devise ways in which the financial burden does not fall upon the Circuits concerned.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Newcastle upon Tyne Synod for highlighting this issue and joins it in thanking all those who work hard in Circuits to keep manses in good order.

Book VII of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD)* 'Guidance relating to Ministers' confirms the partnership referred to in the memorial as follows: "In this partnership it is the responsibility of the Circuit (as set out in Standing Orders 533, 803 and 954) to provide a suitable manse, to decorate it and to furnish it with carpets, curtains, a cooker, office furniture and a lawnmower. It is the clear responsibility of the occupants, on the other hand, to keep the manse clean and presentable and at a changeover to make sure that the manse and its circuit furnishings are left clean and tidy. Exceptional circumstances will occasionally arise in which, for

various reasons, occupants are unable to fulfil this basic obligation – in which case arrangements should be negotiated with the circuit stewards. Normally, however, incoming ministers can expect to find that their predecessors have left the manse clean and habitable in the ways indicated above.”

This places a clear responsibility on ministers when vacating manses, and makes it clear that any arrangements made in response to exceptional circumstances should be by negotiation. It is possible that such arrangements may include ministers being required to meet the costs of any rectification work.

The Conference acknowledges that, although these responsibilities are described clearly in the Standing Orders and guidelines, it can be hard to implement this procedure in practice. It therefore refers this issue to the Ministries Committee to report back to the Conference no later than 2015.

M24 Inter faith relations

The Birmingham District Synod (R) (Present: 127; Voting: 99 for, 15 against) regrets the decision of the Methodist Council not to approve the key recommendations of the Inter Faith Relations Working Group established as a result of Notice of Motion 101 by the 2012 Conference. While we welcome a commitment to explore possible ecumenical partnerships and strengthen existing inter faith networks, we are concerned that a rupture in existing relationships has been brought about by the loss of a dedicated staff position as of May 2013, coupled with the absence of inter faith work from the remit of any continuing member of the Connexional Team. We urge therefore that a high priority be given to developing new patterns which will allow the Methodist Church’s commitment to positive inter faith relations to be affirmed, and the Church at grassroots level to be equipped to engage with the continually growing multi faith consciousness of our society.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham Synod for its memorial.

The Conference is very grateful to the time, expertise and energy given by all of those who served on the Inter Faith Relations Working Group. It notes the discussions and decisions of the Methodist Council, as detailed in the Council’s report to the Conference, and recognises that following these decisions work relating to inter faith issues has been undertaken in various parts of the Connexional Team and meetings with ecumenical partners have commenced.

Nevertheless, the Conference directs the Council to ensure that work to produce a robust and coherent policy relating to inter faith work is continued. The Conference directs that a report is brought to the Conference of 2014 explaining this policy and outlining how work undertaken on inter faith issues will be reported to the Conference in future. The Conference agrees that discussions with ecumenical partners and others which are already underway should continue in the meantime.

M25 Larger than Circuit

The Nottingham and Derby District Synod (R) (Present: 140; Voting: 103 for, 18 against):

- (a) notes that in the *Larger than Circuit* reports, the Nottingham and Derby District and the Lincoln and Grimsby District are frequently linked with the Northampton District;
- (b) believes that in any future re-organisation, new areas need to have a coherence and sense of common geographical identity if they are to be ‘owned’ by the Methodist people within them;
- (c) notes the Methodist Church’s policies on reducing our carbon footprint;

- (d) requests, in the light of the above, that the Conference should encourage those taking forward the *Larger than Circuit* process and other regionalisation initiatives actively to consider the drawing of boundaries which may divide some current Districts in order to achieve new areas with a coherent sense of geographical identity and avoid unnecessarily long journeys within the new areas.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Nottingham and Derby Synod for its memorial and for highlighting the establishment of the East Central Network Region which comprises the Lincoln and Grimsby, Northampton, and Nottingham and Derby Districts.

It should be noted that Network Regions were recommended, in *The Fruitful Field Project* report to the 2012 Conference, to enable “the regional teams to work across regions which are bigger than Districts but smaller than the existing Regional Training Networks in England” (para 168), and that these “are likely to be coordinated within approximately ten to thirteen regions” (para 169). The establishment of 11 Network Regions across England, Scotland and Wales was approved by the Methodist Council in January 2013.

The *Larger than Circuit* report to the 2013 Conference offers the reasons for the proposed conversations on that matter being initially between the Districts in each Network Region, but does not seek to limit their scope or to identify specific desired outcomes. The particular issues that the Synod raises in relation to identity and sustainability are addressed in that report, following a discussion of these and a number of other issues at the Methodist Council meeting in April 2013. The reply to the memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to that report.

M26 Use of alcohol in churches which are community centres

The Melton Mowbray (23/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 30; Voting: 22 for, 7 against), mindful of the need to actively build community in rural areas from which many others are retreating, requests that the Conference looks once more at allowing for the lawful consumption of alcoholic drinks on Methodist premises as specified in Standing Order 922(3A) where the chapel community centre is the only community building available in that place and where a significant part of the mission and activity of the Methodist Church carried out on the premises involves its use as a community centre.

The Circuit Meeting therefore asks the Conference to amend Standing Order 922(3A)(1)(i) to include a clause which grants this permission.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Melton Mowbray Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The Circuit Meeting will recall that amendments were made to Standing Order 922 in 2004 which enable Methodist premises to have alcohol consumed on their premises where the District Policy Committee are satisfied that a significant part of the mission and activity of the Methodist Church carried out on the premises involves use of the premises as a conference centre.

The 2012 Conference declined memorial M31 which sought to insert ‘community’ into Standing Order 922(3A)(i) on the basis that this would significantly increase the number of Methodist premises able to supply, sell and use alcohol on their premises. The Conference continues to hold the view that such a widening of Standing Order 922 would not be appropriate given the public concern over the ready availability of alcohol.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M27 Use of alcohol in shared communion services

The Melton Mowbray Circuit (23/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 30; Voting: 22 for, 7 against) draws the Conference's attention to Standing Order 922 and particularly the use of wine at shared Methodist/Anglican services of Holy Communion, where no sharing agreement or LEP agreement yet exists. We would like to propose that when Anglicans and Methodists join together to celebrate Holy Communion on Methodist premises, as an expression of hospitality the use of alcoholic wine should be permitted.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Melton Mowbray Circuit Meeting for its memorial and commends its desire to offer hospitality to Anglicans at celebrations of Holy Communion.

The Faith and Order Committee's report *His presence makes the feast* (Conference Agenda 2003, pp180-242), stated that Methodists emphasise that Communion is the Communion of Christ and of the whole Church, and that whilst it may be celebrated according to differing, denominationally authorised rites, there is no such thing as a 'Methodist' or other denominational Communion as such (para 111).

In the same year that the Conference received that report, it agreed to enter into a covenant with the Church of England. Commitment 4 of *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* says: "We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches."

Since this encourages eucharistic hospitality "in accordance with the rules of our respective churches", the commitment can be fulfilled without amendments to those rules. (There is no equivalent reference to eucharistic hospitality in either the Covenant of the Covenanted Churches in Wales (1975) or the Statement of Partnership between the Methodist Church in Scotland, the URC National Synod in Scotland, and the Scottish Episcopal Church (2010), both of which involve Anglican Churches.)

It is important to be clear what the Methodist Church's rules are on those matters relating to the subject of this memorial. One is that "in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the wine used shall be non-alcoholic" (Standing Order 922(2)). The Methodist Church, in line with most other denominations, holds that the rules relating to a service of Holy Communion are determined by the denominational identity of the person conducting it; this is what determines whether the sacrament is celebrated "in the name of the Methodist Church". *The Methodist Worship Book* states that the wine used in Holy Communion shall be "the juice of the grape" (p116, note 5). These rules, therefore, apply when a Methodist is presiding wherever the service is held, whether or not a sharing agreement exists, and whether or not a local ecumenical partnership (LEP) has been designated.

In its first interim report, the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) under *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* said that the Methodist Church is strongly committed to keeping the service of Holy Communion "a safe space" both for those with alcohol problems and for children (*In the Spirit of the Covenant*, para 5.4.8). It also said that Anglicans are not insensitive to the issues of alcoholism, and the needs of alcoholics would be taken into consideration when good practice was being observed (para 5.4.4).

The JIC's statement about the Methodist Church arose from what were, then, recent reports to the Conference. In *Alcohol on Methodist Church Premises* (Conference Agenda 2000, pp490-497), it had

been reported that one of the notable outcomes of the widespread discussion throughout the Connexion during the previous year was that, “overwhelmingly, respondents support the retention of the prohibition of alcoholic wine in the celebration of Holy Communion”. This view had also been reported in *His presence makes the feast* (para 40).

The Conference considers that appropriate eucharistic hospitality can be offered to Anglicans and to others within the current rules of the Methodist Church and, therefore, declines the memorial.

M28 Positive Working Together in the Methodist Church

The Basingstoke (26/27) Circuit Meeting (Present: 31; Voting: 25 for, 1 against) believes that the Methodist Church does not currently have a shared understanding of, or sufficient ways of dealing with, issues relating to the behaviour of church members towards each other, including in respect to bullying, harassment and dealing with disagreements. We therefore propose that a four-fold approach, to be called *Positive Working Together* be adopted by the Church and developed to enable it to become practice in the Methodist Church.

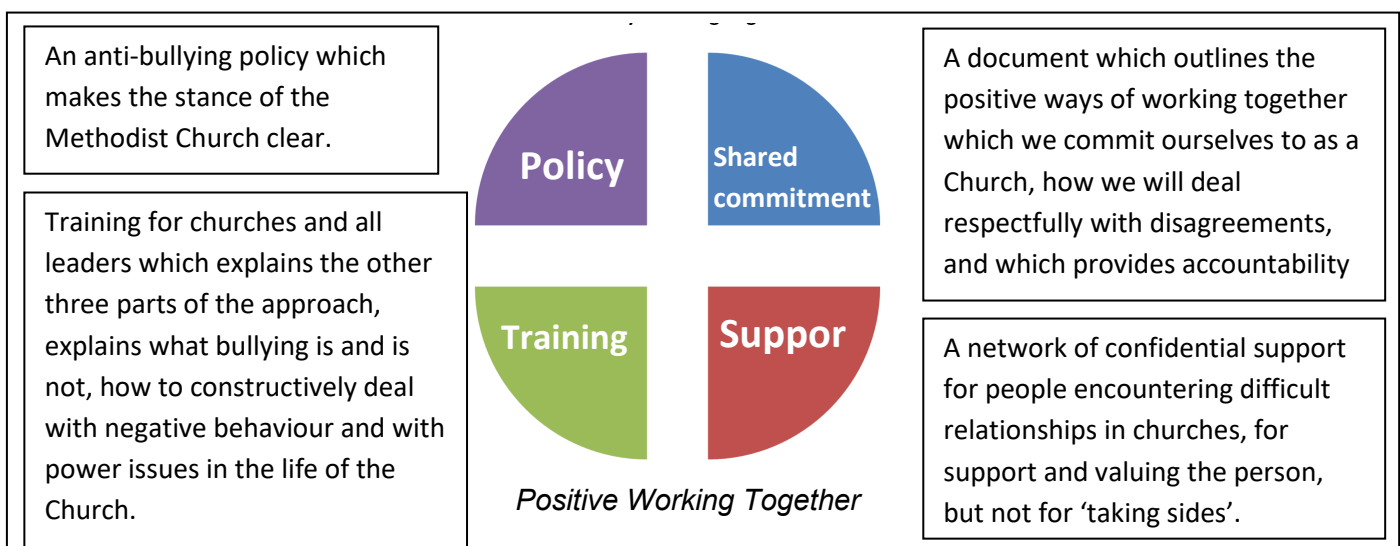
Currently there is an assumption that everyone in the Methodist Church holds in common what is and is not acceptable behaviour in Church life. Sadly this is a poor assumption as we come from different upbringings and life experiences and do not share all values and understandings of how to relate with each other.

In having no clear statements or policies around behaviour in Church life, the Church is left open to negative and destructive behaviour patterns and misuses of power – which may be unintended or may be deliberate, but which are detrimental to the life of the Church and those who are in it or visit it, preventing the Church from being a safe and inclusive community, and even creating an environment where bullying behaviours can thrive.

Respondents in a recent survey indicated that 64% had suffered bullying and comments entered in the survey indicated that there are many instances of being treated badly in the life of the Methodist Church. We do not yet have a truly safe and inclusive Church. We are concerned that the training necessary for dealing with bullying and harassment, recognised in the reply to memorials M39 and M40 (2006) has not been widely implemented.

Positive Working Together is proposed as a four-fold approach which seeks to address these issues holistically and to promote safety and inclusiveness with clarity and accountability. We believe that it is very important that all four elements are planned and implemented together.

In brief the four-fold approach would be:



We ask the Conference to direct the Connexional Team to develop *Positive Working Together* so that the four-fold approach materials, and plans for implementation might be brought to the Conference of 2014 for approval.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Basingstoke Circuit Meeting for raising this important matter and agrees that there are no instances where bullying and harassment are acceptable forms of behaviour. It reaffirms its statement in response to M39 and M40 in 2006 that "Such behaviour is unacceptable and not compatible with the office or standing of ministers or other office holders. Cases of serious and persistent bullying and harassment would therefore need to be dealt with through the Complaints and Discipline procedures." The Conference is also mindful of the command of Jesus to love one another. Therefore, the Conference recognises the importance of clear statements and policies on bullying and harassment as such activities deny the freedom of the people of God.

Dealing with these issues within the Church is vital and has a particular complexity because of the interaction between paid workers, volunteers and those from the wider community which the Church seeks to serve, and potential links with issues of safeguarding. Therefore, the matters raised in this memorial require thorough investigation and a full evaluation of suitable approaches and frameworks, which may include *Positive Working Together*.

The Conference therefore directs the Methodist Council to undertake an evaluation of suitable approaches to dealing with bullying and harassment, and make an initial report to the Conference of 2015, which should include an evaluation of the proposals made by the Basingstoke Circuit.

M29 The lies we tell ourselves

The Edinburgh and Forth (31/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 28; Voting: unanimous) thanks the Methodist Church Connexional Team and partners in the Church of Scotland, Baptist Union of Great Britain and United Reformed Church for their report, published on 1 March 2013, *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*.

At a time when it has become common and even acceptable for political and media debate to stigmatise the poor and propagate the myths that the poor are poor because they are lazy, we call to mind the words of John Wesley, who in 1753 said: "So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, 'they are poor only because they are idle'."

We ask the Conference to continue its affirmation that poverty is a scandal and to further encourage the Connexional Team and ecumenical partners to find ways to develop their work to challenge myths, lies and spin when it comes to debate about poverty, in society and in the Church.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Edinburgh and Forth Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The publication of the report *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, which came out of the Conference report of 2011, *Of Equal Value*, has provoked an encouraging conversation about poverty. The report was picked up by religious and non-religious media, and reached hundreds of thousands of people through social media. Every MP received a copy, and hundreds of people wrote to their MPs asking them to engage with the issues it raised. Several Circuits have planned public meetings with their MPs or others to look at how we can challenge the myths around poverty.

The Joint Public Issues Team, working with the Church of Scotland and other ecumenical partners, plans to continue to find ways to encourage the debate about poverty to be based on truths not myths.

The Conference accepts the memorial. It reiterates the Methodist Council's call for Methodists to study the report, and encourages people in their day-to-day interactions to challenge the attitudes that stigmatise the poor.

M30 Child support payments

The Reading and Silchester (26/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 48; Voting: 47 for, 0 against) supports the Government belief that children in separated families do better if both parents continue to be involved in their lives; it acknowledges and welcomes the important steps the government is taking to encourage this. However, the Circuit Meeting records its concern that some aspects of government legislation are causing severe financial difficulties for non-resident parents, especially those on a low income. The Circuit request that the Methodist Church passes on this concern and asks the government:

- to rectify the errors in the child support maintenance calculation regulations to ensure that the statutory maintenance liabilities are fair and affordable; and
- to ensure that welfare provision for both parents after separation is appropriate, in accordance with Article 34.3 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Reading and Silchester Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

Under current arrangements, parents who are separated can arrange, or be required to arrange, financial contributions, often through the Child Support Agency (CSA). The CSA calculates the amounts to be paid by the non-resident parent to support their children. As this memorial highlights, the interaction between the benefits system and maintenance payments often leaves low-income non-resident parents with insufficient money to subsist.

Non-resident parents should contribute financially to their children's upbringing, but it is clear that deductions which leave a parent with too little to live on are not in the interests of the children. Such circumstances damage children's ongoing relationship with their parents as well as the parent themselves. The Conference has previously supported the concept of minimum income standards, a calculation of what a person or family needs to live, which should be the basis of decisions made about benefits or the level of income needed after deductions (including child support payments).

The Conference therefore directs that appropriate representation be made to write to the government raising the concerns outlined in the memorial, and reaffirms its commitment to promoting the concept of minimum income standards.

M31 Treatment of deportees

The North Yorkshire Coast (29/31) Circuit Meeting (Present: 61; Voting: 59 for, 0 against) is concerned that people whose asylum claims have been rejected are being physically and emotionally abused as they are being deported from the UK. Whatever our personal opinions about deportation or the reasons for deportation, we believe that such abuse is wrong and most certainly should not be perpetrated by people acting on behalf of an agency of HM government.

We are also concerned that not enough care is being taken in considering the manner in which the details of handover back to the country of origin is handled – when papers can be handed over to

immigration officials upon their return. Cameroon is a Commonwealth country where returning asylum seekers can be charged with the crime of bringing the country into disrepute and we are not convinced that there is a robust system in place which can ensure that people handed over by UK Border Agency (UKBA) escorts are not seen as people who have tried to seek protection abroad.

We ask the Conference to write to the Minister for Immigration to express our concern and to ask the Minister to:

- (a) ensure that reports of abuse are investigated fully and fairly, and measures put in place to ensure people are not injured and abused whilst being deported;
- (b) review their policies so that more care is taken regarding the information put into the folders sent with any particular person in order to safeguard them upon their return; and
- (c) that if the government prides itself on not sending people back to danger they should accept credible reports on what has happened to those who have been removed, relying not only on information from the British High Commission, who are not able to become involved with nationals once returned to their own country, but also making it their business to take seriously information given to them by those who have extended their befriending role to following up what has happened after people are returned. We ask that the government would give due weight and attention to statements from the people who it would seem have in these cases been subject to refoulement.

We ask that, as recommended by the Independent Asylum Commission in 2008, the government should devise their own scheme for monitoring what happens post-return, particularly to those alleging past torture. We want to remind the government that the citizens of the UK do not expect our asylum system to allow the sending back of people to torture.

Reply

The Conference thanks the North Yorkshire Coast Circuit Meeting for raising important issues in its memorial.

The treatment of people seeking asylum in the UK has long been a concern of the Methodist Church, and this concern for dignity of treatment continues even when a person is judged to have exhausted their right to stay in the country and is handed over to UK Border Agency/Home Office escorts. Across the country Methodist churches have worked alongside asylum seekers facing deportation, and individuals have acted as visitors to immigration removal centres.

Many have become involved with the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN). CRN made a submission to the Independent Asylum Commission, mentioned in the memorial, which reflected concerns raised in this memorial about the source of country information used by UKBA/the Home Office and the treatment of returnees.

The Conference accepts the memorial, and directs the Methodist Council to ensure that any response received is shared through the Joint Public Issues Team website (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk).

M32 Nestlé

Chorley and Leyland (21/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 42; Voting: 36 for, 0 against) wishes to draw attention to the fact that since 2006, Methodism has profited directly from a million pound investment in Nestlé. This company routinely violates baby milk marketing requirements internationally whilst claiming to be fully compliant with them. In 2006 the Conference directed the Joint Advisory Committee for the Ethics of Investment to report to the Conference on the outcomes of meetings with senior executives of Nestlé and to introduce a mechanism to monitor annually

Nestlé's ethical performance. The Chorley and Leyland Circuit Meeting respectfully requests that the report is presented to the Conference so that the investment can be reviewed. It also requests that the Conference strengthens a call for the consumer boycott of Nestlé and supports campaigns for change and for solidarity with countries who find their regulations under attack from the industry.

Reply

The Methodist Conference thanks the Chorley and Leyland Circuit Meeting for its memorial regarding Nestlé's ethical performance with respect to the marketing of breast milk substitutes. The Joint Advisory Committee for the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) has reported on meetings with senior executives in its annual report to the Methodist Conference in the years 2007 to 2013 (see the Methodist Church website – www.methodist.org.uk/nestle). JACEI has, in recent years, been active in encouraging Nestlé to become fully compliant with, and to seek to join, the FTSE4Good index. Since Nestlé's inclusion in the index, FTSE have commissioned a regular independent verification of the company's performance against the FTSE4Good Breast Milk Substitute Marketing criteria. Members of the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church and the Connexional Team have engaged with FTSE4Good on this verification exercise. JACEI continues to encourage Nestlé and other companies to incorporate fully the International Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes into their operational procedures and to maintain a high degree of vigilance over the implementation of those standards. Given that JACEI is engaging at some depth and continues to report to the Conference on this issue, the Conference does not believe that it needs to review the investment in Nestlé.

With respect to a consumer boycott, the Conference recognises that over the years efforts on the part of campaign groups such as Baby Milk Action have helped persuade companies such as Nestlé to change their corporate practice. Regrettably across a large international company such as Nestlé, specific instances of violations of the International Code may persist. In addition there remains a lack of consensus on interpretation of certain aspects of the International Code. Although instances of the most serious violations have reduced over the past two decades, some Methodist members may, through conscience, wish to maintain a consumer boycott of products. The Conference reiterates the encouragement it gave in 2000 for Methodists to study all the issues and to act accordingly and endorses the continued commitment of JACEI to maintain an active dialogue with Nestlé, both directly as an investor and in collaboration with other partners.

The Conference also supports the call for effective national legislation in all countries in conformity with the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M33 Use of offensive language in broadcasting

The Truro (12/4) Circuit Meeting (Present: 31; Voting: 27 for, 4 against), whilst concerned over the use of offensive language in general, is particularly concerned with the broadcast media's apparently indiscriminate use of blasphemy and profanity.

The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is not only used disrespectfully after the 9:00pm watershed but also prior to this time without warning that such offensive language will be contained during the ensuing programme. We therefore conclude that the abuse of the name of our saviour is not even included in the category of offensive language.

We are aware that the Blasphemy Law was repealed in 2008, but the European Court of Human Rights in 1996 ruled that "The essential foundation of a democratic society carried duties and responsibilities" (see *Wingrove v The United Kingdom* – 25 November 1996 No. 19/1995/525/611).

Also various United Nations resolutions of the early twenty-first century called upon the world to take action against the defamation of religions.

Other faiths do not have to suffer similar media disrespect as does Christianity and it is not difficult to imagine the ramifications if similar disrespect were to be shown to other faiths.

We wish Christianity to be respected by the media and afforded the same courtesy as is given to other faiths.

We therefore implore the Conference:

- (a) to take all possible steps to encourage this matter to be debated once more in the House of Commons;
- (b) to write to the Prime Minister encouraging such a debate; and
- (c) to write to Ofcom seeking to have blasphemy against the name and person of our Lord Jesus Christ prohibited throughout the broadcasting media.

Reply

The Methodist Conference thanks the Truro Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

When discussing offensive religious language, we need to be clear whether we are talking about harm, offence, defamation or religious hatred. As the memorial notes, the law on blasphemy was repealed in 2008, and there is also no legislation covering the defamation of an entire religion. Instead, the law now covers incitement to hatred against a person on the grounds of their religion. Alongside that, current broadcasting codes¹ focus on the harm and offence, including that caused by the use of certain language, with a particular concern for the impact on children.

Although most Christians would not use religious words as profanities, and many find it uncomfortable when they are so used, we live in a society where the use of such words is common. Whilst we would wish to promote respect for all religions, we have no mechanism for legally protecting an entire religion from defamation, nor would many believe this is either possible or desirable. This issue instead concerns the regulation of language in the broadcast media which, in a democratic society, has to be based on an awareness of 'generally accepted standards'.

Under the *Communications Act 2003*, Ofcom has responsibility for a code for standards in television and radio services. (Ofcom does not regulate the BBC in the same way, but does cover issues around the protection of children and harm and offence concerns.) The rules in Ofcom's 'Broadcasting Code' seek to ensure, "in a manner that best guarantees an appropriate level of freedom of expression, that members of the public, and in particular under-eighteens, are adequately protected from the broadcast of harmful and/or offensive material, including potentially offensive language. In providing this protection, the Code requires that broadcasters apply generally accepted standards to the content of television and radio services [...] Where offensive language is used in broadcast material, broadcasters are required to apply adequate context to justify its inclusion."²

Ofcom is guided in its decision-making by both the right to free speech and the right to freedom of belief. But just as there is no absolute right to freedom of speech, nor is there an absolute right not to be offended. Any use of offensive language must be defensible in the context in which it is used.

¹ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/>

² <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/tv-research/offensive-lang.pdf>

Offensive language covers more than religious words; it also includes those which are of a discriminatory or sexually explicit nature. Research into what are 'generally accepted standards' show that audiences judge whether language is offensive on the following principles:

- How offensive the words are felt to be ('milder' words are generally less offensive than 'stronger' ones; discriminatory words are felt to be most offensive).
- Whether children were watching or listening, and the likely impact of the words on them.
- Whether the audience made an informed choice – has there been a warning? Is the programme likely to include offensive words?
- The intent with which the words were used – for example, aggressively towards individuals, mockingly, or light-heartedly.
- Whether the broadcaster acted responsibly – was the language used by accident or to boost ratings?

Regulating the use of offensive language therefore requires the regulator, and the audiences, to make a series of fine judgements about what is considered acceptable within a particular context.

What is therefore of greatest concern to Christians over the use of religious language? Christians will probably regard the use of the name of Jesus or God as a swear word as ranging from uncomfortable to unacceptable, depending on the context and especially when children are involved. However, the use of religious names in conjunction with expletives will be of serious offence to many, and not just Christians. Earlier research by Ofcom indicates that the use of words such as 'Jesus' or 'God' are widely seen as not offensive, but that when combined with expletives most people would judge them to be very offensive.³

In reality Ofcom receives very few complaints around religious language, either because people do not complain or because broadcasters are already self-censoring.

The Conference believes that trying to push for a reintroduction of a concept of blasphemy in the regulation of the media is both unhelpful and impractical. Instead, it encourages the Methodist Council to engage with Ofcom over their approach to the use of offensive religious language, and ensure that the information on the Methodist Church website about how to complain about media broadcasts is updated in the light of this. It also encourages Methodists to familiarise themselves with the broadcasting codes, and actively to complain about (or praise) specific examples they come across in the media.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M34 Personal tracking software

Having noted press reports about the tracking of personal information from social networking sites using Raytheon's Riot (Rapid Information Overlay Technology) software, the Liverpool District Synod (R) (Present: 85; Voting: 76 for, 0 against) requests that the Conference explore with ecumenical partners raising with our government our concerns over the control and possible abuse of Riot as a threat to personal freedom and privacy.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Liverpool Synod for its memorial. The memorial raises difficult questions about what is public and what is private, and the rights over what lies in between. The recent

³ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/radio-research/language.pdf>

disclosures about the use of PRISM, covered widely in the international press, and which implicated social media platforms and governments alike, make the issues outlined in the memorial even more pressing.

The growth of social media, internet transactions and the use of mobile technologies means that there are massive amounts of data available which can help build up a detailed picture of a person's behaviours, locations, activities and preferences. There are concerns, such as those expressed in this memorial, that such data may be used by government or private companies to infringe the privacy of individuals.

It is important for individuals to recognise that once they have an online presence, they will create a significant amount of data about themselves. Some of this can be restricted by an active use of privacy settings; much of it is hard to avoid.

Many people will feel uncomfortable about having personal data freely available, and particularly if such data may be mined and exploited by commercial organisations. While the use of such data does fall under the Data Protection Act and other legislation, it is clear that in the age of Big Data and while the government remains uncertain about whether to create new legislation covering this issue, the situation is extremely complex.

It is clear that the Connexional Team would need to develop a wide body of knowledge and experience to respond directly to this memorial, necessarily entailing a disproportionate use of time and resources, which should be used to greater effect on other issues. However, the Conference notes that there are good Methodist links with the CODEC research team at St John's College, Durham University. CODEC's remit is to explore Christianity within the digital age and issues related to theology in the digital age. The Conference therefore directs the Methodist Council to address the concerns raised in the memorial by inviting CODEC to work with the Connexional Team to produce a report, drawing on academic, ecumenical, governmental and digital industry links, to provide further guidance for the Church on these matters.

M35 Same sex marriage

In light of the February 2013 vote in the House of Commons to allow same sex marriage, the Rochdale and Littleborough (6/4) Circuit Meeting (Present: 50; Voting: 43 for, 5 against) asks the Conference to follow the line that has been laid down by statute for the Church of England that same sex marriages are not allowed on Methodist premises.

Should same sex marriages be permitted on Methodist premises, we ask that no-one will be forced to carry out a legal obligation that is contrary to their beliefs and understanding of marriage as affirmed by scripture.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Rochdale and Littleborough Circuit Meeting for giving consideration to this important matter. The legal positions of the Church of England and the Methodist Church in respect of the 1949 Marriages Act are very different in that under certain provisions anyone has the right to be married in a parish church. However, the same right to marriages does not apply to those who seek to be married in a Methodist church. It is this unique requirement placed upon the Church of England and the Church in Wales that is afforded protection in the provisions of the *Marriages (Same Sex Couples) Bill*.

In light of these legal differences the Methodist Church has made appropriate representation at the various stages of the draft legislation to emphasise both the Methodist Church's teaching on marriage and the need for appropriate protections in respect of those teachings. Those charged with

the responsibility of participating in the consultation and Public Bill Committee process are so far satisfied that the proposed legislation affords the protection which the Rochdale and Littleborough Circuit seeks.

It is recognised that the Bill may have wider implications and raises a range of questions for the Methodist Church. Therefore, the Conference draws to the attention of the Rochdale and Littleborough Circuit to the recommendation of the Methodist Council that in light of the proposed legislation, and by way of responding to memorial M29 (2012) requesting that the ruling of the Conference in respect of the blessing of same sex relationships be revisited, the Conference should establish a working party to:

- consider the implications for the Methodist Church of a change in legislation covering same sex marriage;
- consider whether the Methodist Church's position on marriage needs revising in the light of changes in society undertaking this consideration with reference to scripture, tradition, reason and experience;
- undertake the work directed by the reply to M29 (2012) which directed the Council to revisit the rulings of the Conference in respect of the blessing of same sex relationships;
- make recommendations for any changes in practice or polity.

The Conference directs that the concerns expressed in the memorial should be considered by the working party.

M36 Same sex marriage

The Meon Valley (26/6) Circuit Meeting (Present: 25; Voting: 24 for, 0 against) welcomes the response of the Methodist Church to the government's bill to introduce same sex marriage, namely that "The Methodist Church, in line with scripture and traditional teaching, believes that marriage is a gift from God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one women". Alongside this, we affirm the value the Methodist Church gives to the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men within our churches.

The Meon Valley Circuit Meeting urges the Conference to maintain this balanced position. However, this Circuit Meeting is concerned that the Conference may choose to take up the government's offer to denominations and faith groups of allowing the solemnising of same sex marriages in Methodist chapels and premises. Can the Conference assure the Connexion that the British Methodist Church will not take up the government's offer to 'opt in'?

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Meon Valley Circuit Meeting for raising the question of how the *Marriages (Same Sex Couples) Bill* will impact upon the Methodist Church. The Conference does not have before it any proposal to respond to the provisions of the Bill should it be enacted. In participating in the various consultations and also at the Public Bill Committee those representing the views of the Conference were bound by the earlier decision of the Conference in respect of the definition of marriage and the blessing of same sex couples on Methodist premises.

The Conference draws the attention of the Meon Valley Circuit to the advice offered to the Conference by the Methodist Council to establish a working party to look at the issues raised by changes in the marriage legislation, and therefore the Conference directs that the concerns expressed in this memorial should be considered by the working party.

M37 Same sex partnership and marriage

Following the Synod's 2012 memorial relating to the blessing of civil partnerships and the government's *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill*, the Birmingham District Synod (R) (Present: 102; Voting: 92 for, 4 against) wishes to support the Methodist Council's proposals to set up a working group to consider these matters.

Birmingham Synod notes that the Methodist Council has asked for the establishment of a working group and asks the Conference to agree to setting up such a working group and asks the Conference to request a report to the Conference in 2014.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham Synod for its memorial and believes that the establishment of a working party, as advised by the Methodist Council, is the most appropriate way to explore, in a spirit of trust and respect, the questions raised both by the Synod's memorial (M29) to the 2012 Conference and the proposed legislative change to the legal definition of marriage.

The Conference wishes the working party to explore such questions over a period of time that most helpfully affords a wise and compassionate consideration of the range of questions and theological understandings present within the whole Connexion. Therefore, whilst the Conference directs the working party to bring a report to the 2014 Conference, the working party should not feel that it must complete its work within a year given that it may wish to undertake a range of consultations.

M38 Title of the Methodist Church

The Channel Islands District Synod (R) (Present: 34; Voting: unanimous) wishes to express its concern at the recent and frequent use of the term 'Methodist Church in Britain' (MCB).

Whilst we recognise that the British Methodist Church is not *The* Methodist Church, our concern is that 'Methodist Church *in Britain*' excludes those parts of our Connexion which are not *in Britain*, ie the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Malta and Gibraltar Circuits in the South East District.

We request that serious consideration be given to choosing a name which represents and includes all parts of our Connexion.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Channel Islands Synod for its memorial. The Conference notes that the official title of the church as set out in the Methodist Church Act 1976 is 'The Methodist Church in Great Britain' and, thereafter, the Methodist Church. It is the latter title that is used in the Deed of Union and the Model Trusts. It is worthy of some note therefore that the abbreviated title of the church is such as to meet the understandable concerns of the Channel Islands Synod. Equally, the Conference is aware of the sensitivities of using the title 'The Methodist Church' when engaging with other Methodist Churches. The use of the term 'in Britain' can be a powerful reminder to all parts of the Connexion that there are other Methodist Churches.

Given the definition of a title for the Methodist Church in various legislative documents the Conference does not consider it necessary to give consideration to the choosing of a name as the District hopes might be the case. However, the Conference, in drawing to the attention of all Methodist bodies the definition contained within the Act, directs that care is given to the use of any title which seeks to link a geographical location to the title of the Methodist Church.