

15. “... Racism is a Denial of the Gospel”: Notice of Motion 203 (2009)

Basic Information

Title	Report on Notice of Motion 203 (2009): “... Racism is a denial of the gospel”
Contact Name and Details	Rachel Lampard, Team Leader, Joint Public Issues Team – lampardr@methodistchurch.org.uk or 020 7467 5298 Gareth Powell, Legal and Constitutional Practice – powellg@methodistchurch.org.uk or 020 7467 5140
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Resolution/s	Resolutions can be found at the end of the Report

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The Methodist Conference in 2009 directed the Methodist Council to explore any changes needed to give effect to a resolution stating that membership of an organisation which promotes racism is inconsistent both with membership of the Methodist Church, and with employment which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church. This report contains the recommendations agreed by Methodist Council.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section I – this report advises that the Methodist Church already has the constitutional framework to enact this policy, but recommends minor revisions to Standing Orders. It also makes recommendations to ensure the resolution can be implemented across the Church, with implications for our practices around membership preparation, resourcing ministries and lay employment. • Section II – updates the Conference on the establishment of a resource group to support Connexional Team work in countering political extremism.

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<p>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</p>	<p>The Conference passed Notice of Motion 203: "... Racism is a denial of the gospel" (Daily Record 8/6) which asked Methodist Council to "explore any changes needed to give fuller effect to the principle that being a member of any organisation whose constitution, aims or objectives promote racism is inconsistent with membership of the Methodist Church, or with employment which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church and, if so, to bring proposals to the Conference of 2010"</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Proposed minor amendments to 361A Racial Justice and 050 Admission, and creation of 013B Racism; Code of Conduct for Methodist Council employees to be brought before Methodist Council in 2010; Districts, Circuits and Churches to be encouraged to incorporate a commitment to equality in all future job descriptions and adopt a model Code of Conduct for employees, this may impact on local ecumenical arrangements.</p>
<p>Risk</p>	<p>The Methodist Church may face further public criticism from both inside and outside the Church for giving profile to this issue.</p>

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Summary

1. The Methodist Conference in 2009 directed the Methodist Council to explore any changes needed to give effect to a resolution stating that membership of an organisation which promotes racism is inconsistent both with membership of the Methodist Church, and with employment which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church. This report contains the recommendations agreed by Methodist Council.
2. Section I of this report recommends that the Methodist Church already has the constitutional framework to enact this policy, but recommends minor revisions to Standing Orders regarding the location of the statement that "racism is a denial of the gospel", and ensuring that membership preparation should include "an introduction to the doctrines, discipline and formal statements of the Methodist Church, including its belief that racism is a denial of the gospel".
3. The report also makes a number of recommendations to ensure the resolution can be implemented across the Church. There are implications for our practices around membership preparation, resourcing ministries and lay employment.
4. In Section II this report also updates the Conference on the establishment of a resource group to support Connexional Team work in countering political extremism.

Background

5. In 2009 the Methodist Conference adopted the following resolution:

Notice of Motion 203: '... racism is a denial of the gospel'

SO 361A states: 'The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel.'

The Conference notes:

- a. with warm approval that the Church of England at their February General Synod voted to prohibit members of the clergy from being members of the BNP;
- b. with deep dismay the recent electoral success of parties with nationalistic ideologies, in particular the BNP;
- c. the certainty of a general election by June 2010;
- d. the letter sent by the Equality and Human Rights Commission asking the BNP to make changes to its constitution to comply with the Race Relations Act 1976.*

Therefore the Conference resolves:

1. that being a member of an organisation which promotes racism is not consistent with being a Methodist;
2. that the Methodist Council be directed to explore any changes needed to give fuller effect to the principle that being a member of any organisation whose constitution, aims or objectives promote racism is

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- inconsistent with membership of the Methodist Church, or with employment which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church and, if so, to bring proposals to the Conference of 2010;*
3. *that the Connexional Team urgently identifies and makes available resources to enable all local churches, circuits & districts to engage with this issue, especially in the approach to a general election;*
 4. *that the Joint Public Issues Team engage with Government and all church members addressing the social and economic issues that have created the current widespread disaffection with the mainstream political process;*
 5. *that all members and officers of the Methodist Church be reminded of the gospel imperative to love and accept all God's children and to reject racism in all its forms. In addition, the Conference asserts that those who support racist organisations are also God's children in need of love, hope and redemption.*

**Under the BNP Constitution the membership criteria limit membership to 'The indigenous British ethnic groups deriving from the class of 'Indigenous Caucasian' consist[ing] of members of: i) The Anglo-Saxon Folk Community; ii) The Celtic Scottish Folk Community; iii) The Scots-Northern Irish Folk Community; iv) The Celtic*

Welsh Folk Community; v) The Celtic Irish Folk Community; vi) The Celtic Cornish Folk Community; vii) The Anglo-Saxon-Celtic Folk Community; viii) The Celtic-Norse Folk Community; ix) The Anglo-Saxon-Norse Folk Community; x) The Anglo-Saxon-Indigenous European Folk Community; xi) Members of these ethnic groups who reside either within or outside Europe but ethnically derive from them.'

Update

6. Since the Methodist Conference adopted this Notice of Motion, the British National Party has been required by the courts to alter its constitution to allow all people to join the party. The party states that it has made these changes. The party's policies, however, remain unchanged.

Section I – Giving effect to Part 2 of Notice of Motion 203

A. Standing Orders and Complaints and Discipline Procedure

7. The primary concerns of this Notice of Motion already find articulation in Standing Orders and the Resolutions of the Conference. Standing Order 361A states that "*The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel*". Reports such as *Faithful and Equal* embody the Methodist Church's commitment to racial equality and this commitment is currently being taken forward as part

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of the Church's work on Equalities and Diversity.

8. SO 1130(3) states that '*. . . a charge is an allegation that the respondent:*
 - i. *has committed a serious breach of the discipline of the Church as contained in the 1976 Act, the Deed of Union, the Model Trusts or Standing Orders;*
 - ii. *has shown serious disregard of a resolution of the Conference or the usage of the Church as generally understood;*
 - iii. *has or might have seriously impaired the mission, witness or integrity of the Church by his or her words, acts or omissions (including words, acts or omissions in situations of confidentiality or pastoral care), having regard to his or her office or standing in relation to the Church.'*
9. The Motion refers to the '*principle that being a member of any organisation whose constitution, aims or objectives promote racism is inconsistent with membership of the Methodist Church'*. The Complaints and Discipline Procedure examines the circumstances of each complaint and a person's membership of a racist organisation would not be *prima facie* evidence for the instant removal of Methodist membership. Although such organisations may have a clear racist political agenda, it is conceivable that a person has joined the organisation for other reasons. If a member of the

Methodist Church had a complaint brought against them on the basis of membership of an organisation that is deemed to be racist it would be for the various stages of the Complaints and Discipline procedure to explore with them their conduct and lifestyle, and what their membership of a racist organisation means to them. Ultimately, if the Connexional Discipline Committee finds a charge to be established then the committee can remove a person from membership.

10. It is therefore the case that the existing Complaints and Discipline procedure of the Methodist Church enable a complaint to be brought against a member of the Methodist Church if it were believed by the complainant that the respondent's words, actions or omissions were racist, on the basis that the Conference has expressed a mind on the issue of racism. **Therefore it is recommended that our current standing orders are rigorous and sufficiently clear in giving effect to the resolutions of the Conference not to require substantive changes.**
11. As noted above, the Methodist Church's commitment to racial equality is found unequivocally in resolutions of the Conference and in Standing Orders. The only explicit reference in Standing Orders, however, is in the expression used in the Notice of Motion – "*... racism is a denial of the gospel*" – and this is located within a section of Standing

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Orders dealing with grant-making. It is found in the Finance section of Standing Orders to ensure that:

'provision shall be made from the Methodist Church Fund and from any restricted funds raised for appropriate purposes for grants to Methodist and ecumenical bodies and projects and to other organisations (whether local or national) in order to support work against discrimination and marginalisation on racial grounds'.

12. The present location of the phrase "racism is a denial of the gospel" does not appropriately reflect the understanding which the Methodist Church has of racism. As a Church our view on this matter is not formulated simply to provide for a fund; rather it reflects an understanding of God and the valuing of all humanity. Relocating the first sentence of SO 361(A) to a new proposed O13B would remove this anomaly and mean that the statement that racism is a denial of the gospel is instead located alongside other statements about Methodist beliefs which should be embodied in and evidenced by behaviours.
13. It is also recommended that candidates for membership should also be made aware of the doctrines, discipline and formal statements of the Methodist Church, including its belief that racism is a denial of the gospel, and this change is discussed below and proposed as a revised SO 050.

B. Membership

15. The concept of "membership" is key to a Methodist self-understanding both of belonging and discipleship. The statement that membership of an organisation which promotes racism is inconsistent with membership of the Methodist Church has implications both for our Complaints and Discipline procedures, as discussed above, and also our practices regarding preparation for membership.

16. Standing Order O50(4) states:

Before approving admission to membership the Church Council shall be satisfied of each candidate's sincere acceptance of the basis of membership in the Methodist Church as shown by evidence of life and conduct, by fidelity to the ordinances of the Church and by the maintenance of Christian fellowship in the means of grace.

In one of Methodism's foundational documents, *Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists 1743* (Volume 1 of CPD), Wesley sets out a very simple, low threshold for entry into membership of "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins". It then states, however, that there have to be visible fruits of that desire and sets out examples of such fruits, such as an avoidance of drunkenness, usury or fraud. It could be argued that challenging racism is a contemporary

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equivalent of these fruits. Wesley also interestingly goes on to argue that if people insist on behaving in ways that do not bring forth such fruit they should eventually be excluded from membership.

17. The recommendation that the Notice of Motion can be put into effect through the use of existing procedures does mean that the Complaints and Discipline procedures can only be used after a person has become a member of the Church. In theory this means that a person could become a member and only then be challenged over their membership of a racist organisation. For this reason, church councils (which have responsibility for membership preparation) should be encouraged to ensure that candidates for membership are made aware of the commitment of the Methodist Church to equality and diversity as part of their membership preparation, and that their attention is drawn to the implications of our understanding that racism is a denial of the Gospel. **Resolution 1 would require Church Councils to make candidates for membership aware of the doctrines, discipline and formal statements of the Methodist Church, including its belief that racism is a denial of the gospel, and Resolution 2 asks the Working Party on Membership to take the implications of this change into consideration.**

18. Some people have questioned whether the stance of the Church adopted in the Notice of Motion prevents members of a racist organisation attending a Methodist Church, receiving communion or being baptised. The Methodist Church made the following statement to the media on 17 November 2006¹ in response to suggestions that members of racist political parties should be denied communion:

The Methodist understanding of communion is as a means of grace and a means of conversion. Communion is therefore offered to all who are looking for a deeper relationship with God. This should in itself cause people to challenge their attitudes. We would refer people to 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 where Paul suggests that if people come to communion and don't allow themselves to be challenged in this way, then it is God who will judge them. We would welcome everybody into Methodist churches. There is no room within the Church for racism under any circumstances, and we will always challenge these attitudes but we will never turn people away.

19. The working group recognises that ministers and others called upon to engage with issues of communion, baptism or church attendance within a pastoral relationship may need further support. **It is recommended**

¹ See <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.archiveDetail&year=2006&newsid=174>

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that the Methodist Church's Equalities and Diversity office prepare and develop resources for ministers and leadership teams facing such situations as part of its overall programme, and that the forthcoming Equalities and Diversity theological statement clearly articulates that "racism is a denial of the gospel".

C. Local Preachers and Ordained Ministers

20. The recommendation that membership of racist organisations can and should be dealt with within the existing Standing Orders and disciplinary proceedings with regard to membership of the Methodist Church means that local preachers, other office holders including those working with children and young people, and ordained ministers will automatically be covered.
21. In addition to this general safeguard, existing selection and initial learning programmes include provision regarding issues of equality and diversity.
- A key learning aim of one of the units of the Faith & Worship course (for those becoming local preachers) is "to explore the 'being' and 'doing' of the Christian life, in its devotional and practical aspects for individual Christians and to consider implications for the preacher."
 - The selection criteria for candidates for the diaconate

and the presbyterate include the provision that "*all candidates should be ... prepared to acknowledge that Methodism is part of a plural and multicultural society and be prepared to work beyond and across boundaries ... [and] able to demonstrate in their behaviour and attitudes their commitment to opposing discrimination and injustice which are encountered as barriers in issues such as those of race, religion, gender, poverty, disability, and sexual orientation.*"

- The expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into full connexion include "the capacity to bear the public roles and responsibilities of an ordained person and to perform credibly and maturely as a deacon or presbyter both in the Methodist Church and in the wider community."

22. However, it is clearly important to ensure that local preachers and ordained ministers are selected and resourced in ways which mean that they are aware of and able to support the beliefs of the Methodist Church with regard to racism. Again the Equalities and Diversity work of the Methodist Church views this work as an important component of its wider responsibilities.

D. Employment

23. The Notice of Motion also stated that membership of racist

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organisations should be inconsistent with employment "*which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church*".

The document, *Speaking for the Methodist Church*, covers all members of the Connexional Team, those members of staff of linked bodies and those whose posts are funded from Connexional funds, and places a requirement on all staff to speak "*in harmony with the existing statements and resolutions of the Conference*". In addition it is worth noting that all Connexional Team Person Specifications produced as part of the *Team Focus* process include a commitment to equality principles.

24. Should the question of disciplinary action arise, however, it is currently unclear how action based on a person's membership of an organisation (rather than their behaviour) would stand under the Human Rights Act provisions and other legislation on freedom of belief. This is due, amongst other factors, to the range of case law currently developing. That said, the Development and Personnel Office of the Connexional Team is in the process of developing a Code of Conduct for all Methodist Council employees. This code will focus on the kinds of behaviours which are expected of employees, and staff members who transgress the code, of which racism will be one area, will be liable to dismissal for gross misconduct. It is anticipated that

this Code of Conduct will be brought to Methodist Council for adoption in October 2010.

25. However, on a daily basis there are many people, who are not members of the Connexional Team or employees of the Methodist Council, who in local contexts might be perceived as representing the Church or speaking on its behalf. Lay employees, youth workers and District Evangelism Enablers, for example, may all be seen by those around them as representatives of the Methodist Church. This report therefore recommends that the Conference encourages districts, circuits and churches to incorporate a commitment to equality in all future job descriptions, as well as in existing ones when they are reviewed, for example as part of the appraisal process. In addition it is planned that the Methodist Council Code of Conduct mentioned above will be adapted into a model Code for use in the wider church and offered for use in the lay employment pack. This model Code could be incorporated into the contracts of employment for new employees, and offered to existing employees as guidance. If individual churches wished to incorporate the code the code directly into existing contracts they could do so by negotiation. In any case it would stand as guidance which could be referred to (along with other documents such as equal opportunities policies) in disciplinary matters.

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Section II – The Resource Group on Countering Political Extremism

Context

26. The 2003 Methodist Conference adopted Notice of Motion 31 (ministry in areas of racial tension), which called on the Connexional Team to provide more resources to help churches and ministers address political extremism. A small group (known as the NM31 Group) was appointed to advise and assist in the preparation of these resources. Members of the group were largely drawn from areas where extreme parties are active. The group has been responsible for producing the *Countering Political Extremism* web pages and associated materials (www.methodist.org.uk/extremism). It has also provided information about extremist parties, and advice about if, when and how the church should speak out against extreme politics on a national level.
27. The group has largely achieved what it set out to do. However, the issue of political extremism has not gone away. Far-right and extremist parties have increased their overall share of the vote and there are now representatives in the European Parliament, the London Assembly and several local councils. Recent months have also seen increased activity from so-called 'Defence Leagues'.
- The polarisation of communities, compounded by economic difficulties, means that the threat of political extremism unlikely to recede in the near future.
28. The Churches' role in countering political extremism can be influential. This might be through responding to political parties' claims to speak for Christianity, or through encouraging cohesion and good inter faith relations in local communities. Whilst the Methodist Church has been active on this issue for several years, it is felt that we would benefit from co-operation with a number of other denominations with different experiences and strategies.
29. The Methodist Church has set up a Resource Group on Countering Political Extremism which aims to share ideas and co-ordinate action across denominations, and to provide the work of Methodist Church and that of other denominations with fresh ideas, direction and dynamism. The group is chaired by Revd Stephen Poxon and its aims include:
- acting as a sounding board for the Connexional Team;
 - motivating local churches and providing web-based resources;
 - establishing contacts and good relationships with individuals and organisations sharing similar aims, and to looking to collaborate wherever possible with them.

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*** RESOLUTIONS

15/1. The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows

361A Racial Justice. (1) ~~**The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel.**~~ As part of the Church's witness to the gospel and in order to promote racial justice, provision shall be made from the Methodist Church Fund and from any restricted funds raised for appropriate purposes for grants to Methodist and ecumenical bodies and projects and to other organisations (whether local or national) in order to support work against discrimination and marginalisation on racial grounds.

013B Racism. The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel.

050 Admission. (1) The Church Council shall itself or through the Pastoral Committee arrange preparation classes for all candidates for membership. **Such preparation shall include an introduction to the doctrines, discipline and formal statements of the Methodist Church, including its belief that racism is a denial of the gospel.** [...]

15/2. The Conference directs the Working Party on Membership to take into consideration the implications of implementing the proposed change to Standing Order 050.

15/3. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Equalities and Diversity policy of the Methodist Church, any associated guidance and other future resources should be developed to help members, candidates for the Ministry, Local Preachers, Ministers and leadership teams to engage with the issues of racism in the Church and that the forthcoming Equalities and Diversity theological statement clearly articulates that "*racism is a denial of the gospel*".

15/4. The Conference encourages districts, circuits and churches to incorporate a commitment to equality in all future job descriptions and adopt a model Code of Conduct for employees; and directs the Connexional Team to bring a draft Methodist Council Code of Conduct to the Methodist Council for adoption early in the connexional year 2010–11, and that a model Code for use elsewhere be drawn from that.