

32. Towards an Inclusive Church

Basic Information

Title	Towards an Inclusive Church
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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	For Decision
Draft Resolution	See at the end of the Report

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To approve the proposal of an interim architecture for Equality and Diversity (E&D) work within the Church and to inform the Conference of the Belonging Together Partnership
Main Points	Background to Methodist E&D work; proposals from Team Focus and the Review of Committees. The Belonging Together Partnership. Proposals for E&D Architecture: Phases One and Two.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Various UK legislation and European Directives referring to discrimination, equality of opportunity and issues of access. Equality Act 2010 harnesses various equality streams and comes into force October 2010. Relevant Methodist documentation is vast as social justice and E&D reports to the Methodist Conference date as far back as 1933. An original report, based on the work of a Resource Group, was amended in the light of debate in the April meeting of the Methodist Council and subsequent consultation with individual members of the Council.
Impact	All levels of Church life will be affected. Similar work towards single equality action plans is already in progress in some of our ecumenical partners. Amendments will be required to SO 352, SO 102, SO 336. Close working with Faith and Order needed to produce a theological statement on equality and diversity. There will be a total cost of circa £30k for the Resource Group and Stakeholder Forums that will be set up initially. At the moment there is one full time E&D Officer and a half time support post. In addition there will be two full-time postholders to work on the <i>Belonging Together</i> project.
Risk	Slow progress in this area may lower our credibility as a strong voice for social justice.

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“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

(Galatians 3:28)

Introduction

1. The Methodist Church has a long, active and pioneering tradition of engaging with what are now called Equality and Diversity (E&D) issues. Work on gender justice was first brought to the Wesleyan Conference in 1928¹ and the first women Presbyters were ordained in 1974. This was a year before the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) in the UK, and it was a significant breakthrough for the ordination of women not only in the Methodist Church, but also for those of our ecumenical partners who had not by then made the step. The first woman to be elected as President of the Methodist Conference was in 1992. Work on racial justice was brought to Conference in 1962² which was long before the UK Government's introduction of the Race Relations Act (1976) and the subsequent UK legislation on race relations and race equality. The first black Deacon started travel in 1997 and was ordained in 1999. It is thought

the first black and minority ethnic Presbyter was ordained in 1957. In 1985 the first black Vice-President of the Conference was elected.

2. Social justice issues in wider society informed and influenced the work of the Committee for Racial Justice and the Gender Justice Committee within the Church. Whilst some breakthroughs have been made, the Church is by no means as diverse and inclusive as it should be and has not been able to maintain the impetus for change in these areas. It has been argued that the pace of change within both of these areas was hampered by the two connexional committees not having clear lines of accountability and ownership.
3. In working towards an inclusive Church we must make intentional the valuing of the whole people of God. The structure contained within this report is the means towards creating that holistic Church and to move away from what could be described as fractured communities and encourage local churches to engage with and own the social justice issues that are still of concern to the Church. In April 2010, a report which aimed to meet this vision was brought to the Methodist Council. The Council, while affirming the intention of the report and the

¹ In the year 1928 the Wesleyan Methodist Conference first appointed a Committee to report on the question of the admission of women to the Ministry, and from that time the subject has come before successive Conferences.

The Methodist Conference of 1933 accepted a report declaring that 'there is no function of the ordained ministry, as now exercised by men, for which a woman is disqualified by reason of her sex.' (Minutes, 1933, p. 438).

² 1962: The Committee for the Care of Immigrants, through what was then the Home Mission Department, reported to Conference that it was deeply disturbed about the "emergence of colour prejudice" and opposed to the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, which later became the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962.

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general direction of the developments it proposed, was of the view that an interim stage was needed before the Church could be in a position to adopt a comprehensive Equality & Diversity framework. Since that meeting of the Methodist Council, further work has been done to demonstrate how this phasing might be achieved and this report brings the conclusions to the Conference.

Background and Context

4. The Committees for Racial Justice and Gender Justice are of longstanding, and have contributed much valuable work and progress in the areas of justice and inclusiveness for the Church. SO 336 sets out the terms of reference for the Racial Justice Committee as follows:

SO 336(2) *The committee shall have within its purview the concerns of members of Black and Asian communities and of the whole Church for:*

- (i) *public policy affecting racial justice;*
- (ii) *the contribution of members of Black and Asian communities to the life of the Church and its varied ministries.*

5. The terms of reference for the Gender Justice Committee were agreed by the Conference in 2000 and are as follows:

This Committee aims to facilitate the Church in its task of addressing institutional sexism and raising gender awareness across the whole of the Methodist Church in Britain. The Committee will work to promote Gender Justice and Equality by the following means:

- a. *Ensuring contact points are available for people wishing to raise issues of sexism as experienced within Methodism.*
- b. *Responding to and collating the issues of institutional sexism which have been raised and their implications.*
- c. *Ensuring the establishment of procedures to monitor the appointment of lay and ordained women with a view to enabling their full participation in formal structures.*
- d. *Ensuring strategies are developed through the Church to address those issues which are identified.*
- e. *Promoting affirmative action including the training, developing and consciousness-raising of women in order to develop their full potential in the Methodist Church.*
- f. *Scrutinising statements, reports, policy and papers for adoption by the Methodist Conference with a view to assisting the Church to avoid the perpetuation of institutional sexism.*
- g. *Supporting the implementation of any Equal Opportunities Policy of the Methodist Church.*
- h. *Facilitating the development of a theological base for the critique*

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- of power relationships within the Church with particular reference to gender.*
- i. *Receiving reports from Methodist Women's Forum, Women's Network of the Methodist Church and others involved in various issues.*
 - j. *Relating to and consulting with other relevant bodies.*
 - k. *Presenting reports to the Methodist Council as appropriate.*
 - l. *Commissioning specific relevant pieces of work.*
6. The Team Focus review of the Connexional Team determined that a post of Equality and Diversity Officer be created with wide ranging responsibilities around the promotion of, and training in, equality and diversity. This was to ensure that work and progress within the various justice committees would be built upon and have greater impact within and beyond the Team. This post was agreed at the Conference in 2008, and recruited as part of the new Team. The 2008 E&D report to the Conference also directed the Connexional Team to develop the E&D architecture as described in that report which would:
- enable a separate voice to be heard from each of the areas of concern but at the same time facilitate mutual support and a rich collaboration in discerning the principal challenges for the Church in the overall Equality and Diversity agenda;
 - identify work to be done;
 - start implementing recommendations from across the various committees.
7. To help achieve this, the report asked for an Equality and Diversity Forum to be led by the Equality and Diversity Officer. In addition to enabling the separate voices to be heard the forum would also:
- collate and publicise monitoring information;
 - facilitate the development of E&D work.
8. Subsequently work as part of the Review of Committees has identified the need for rethinking the shape of the existing committees related to E&D concerns and the importance of giving them time to help with the evolution to new patterns. This suggested that a rapid move to a single Forum might not be the best way of building on the existing work.
9. While work was done on how to draw these various threads into a coherent whole, a parallel commitment emerged to strengthen E&D work in the life of the Church: *Belonging Together*.
- The Belonging Together Partnership**
10. In the later stages of the Team Focus review, a consensus emerged round the idea of a major piece of work celebrating and developing the existing diversity of the Methodist Church, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity and seeking to address various issues which had been

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identified as problematic. This could provide a positive and high profile element to the overall E&D work and has now been developed into the *Belonging Together Partnership*.

11. The *Belonging Together Partnership* is based on a vision that the Methodist Church in Britain in the 21st century will fulfil its vocation of worship and mission through its richly diverse membership and fully recognising the plural society within which it is placed. It is a vision which celebrates the Church's diversity and rejoices at the creative interaction within the Connexion of people and groups of culturally different backgrounds, enabling all to contribute positively to the ministry of the whole people of God. It is a vision of an environment which affirms our distinctive ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, while encouraging us to learn from each other and share with each other our gifts, graces and experiences to that the Church will be able to celebrate together. The Partnership involves Districts, various sections of the Connexional Team, Training Institutions, and those responsible for racial justice, and seeks to:
 - A. record the experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds coming forward for leadership;
 - B. put in place a model of sustainability for events and networks which support black and ethnic minority ministers and congregations;
 - C. improve the induction and training support of overseas ministers joining the Methodist Church in Britain;
 - D. improve the support of ethnic minority ministers with predominantly Black and Majority Ethnic congregations;
 - E. improve the induction and training support in cross cultural issues for ministers and congregations within the Connexion;
 - F. review the criteria for candidating, preparing and stationing of those coming forward for ordained and lay ministry in Britain;
 - G. develop strategies to spread more widely the spiritual theological and practical understandings discovered or developed in the London, Birmingham and other Districts;
 - H. work with children and young people to explore these issues;
 - I. initiate discussion on how CPD could accommodate the aims of *Belonging Together*;
 - J. map the current diversity of Church membership, and those coming forward for authorised forms of ministry.
12. A meeting of the Partners is planned in May 2010, and some of the objectives are already making progress e.g. a new induction course for Ministers coming into the British Methodist Church from overseas has been introduced.
13. The Connexional Team has made substantial commitments to the work of this Partnership by allocating

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£0.5 million over the next three years, including two full-time posts.

14. The Partnership Officers will work closely with the E&D Officer to ensure that the outcomes of the Partnership are fed into the work plan of the E&D office. The Partnership Officers will also link in with the Racial Justice Stakeholder Forum.

E&D Architecture Proposals from the Methodist Council

15. Alongside the *Belonging Together Partnership*, the question of what form of architecture would best promote E&D objectives within the life of the Church remains. Having considered the options put forward in the report of April 2010, the Methodist Council proposes the arrangements set out below for the longer term development and promotion of E&D. Behind these proposals is the recognition by the Council that although a single Forum which embraces all the equality streams without distinction would be a preferable model to fragmented work, currently the various E&D streams (race, gender, age, etc.) are at different stages of development and that there are inherent differences which still need to be resolved.
16. In the light of these considerations the structure proposed by the Council is designed to build up the capacity to deal with the diverse questions which need to be addressed by the

Church, and to be appropriately representative. Equally the structure needs to be robust in being able to challenge poor practice and potentially discriminatory behaviour, and having sufficient resource to ensure its voice is heard.

17. The Council believed that it was essential that the following principles and perceptions be taken into account in the new architecture. It should be a framework that will:
 - i) include the aims and objectives previously contained within the various justice committees;
 - ii) consolidate and build upon the progress already achieved within those committees (notably the Committees for Racial Justice and Gender Justice);
 - iii) recognise current expertise already present within some committees and the need for work and action in some areas of equality which have not yet been developed;
 - iv) recognise that those working in the areas of gender justice and human sexuality wish to work together as one group;
 - v) explore contacts and identify experts to assist and inform the thinking and work across all equality streams;
 - vi) consider the setting up of interim structures and timing of phases that may be necessary in order to align thinking and work across the various equality streams;
 - vii) eventually work towards achieving a final E&D

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- architecture for the Church which will be informed by the expertise available to the Church in each of the different equality streams;
- viii) collaborate consciously and purposefully with Faith and Order, Law and Polity, Belonging Together and Ecumenical Partners;
 - ix) recognise the proposed changes to SO 336 and the subsequent changes for the Racial Justice Committee and find ways, resources and mechanisms to address these;
 - x) recognise the proposed changes to SO 102 and find mechanisms to ensure representation from Black and Minority Ethnic members at Conference is not adversely affected;
 - xi) bid for and allocate appropriate resources that will be needed to enable the proposed architecture to be implemented via the E&D Officer;
 - xii) confirm that the Connexional Team is made responsible and held accountable for realising all of the above through an Equality and Diversity Officer who will have various forms and sources of support;
 - xiii) work towards a theology that will reaffirm and underpin the values, principles and objectives of the Church's E&D work, which will help to inform and direct the future work of the Church in this area;
 - xiv) work towards the longer term development of a Church that is representative of the various

communities it serves, is welcoming to all peoples and allows for differences. It should not only recognise and affirm these differences but also make purposeful interventions and provide support mechanisms to allow them to survive and to thrive successfully within the Church.

Phase One of the Structure

18. Taking account of these issues, Council proposed, as an initial phase, the establishment of an Equality and Diversity Resource Group for two years. As a Resource Group it would exist to undertake a clearly defined and time limited piece of work, and would comprise of a minimum of 12 persons. Its initial task would be to establish Stakeholder Forums for the following streams:
 - Racial Justice
 - Gender and Human Sexuality
 - Age
 - Disability and Impairment
 - Poverty and Access
19. The proposed structures in both Phases One and Two will comply with the overall Review of Committees in that responsibility for making policy will lie with the formal Governance of the Church. Officers and employees of the Council will serve by both helping in the development of policy and in ensuring that it is implemented and effectively monitored. The central importance, therefore of the structures will be to ensure that all

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stages of this process are properly grounded in a thorough consultation and collaborative approach.

20. The purpose of the forums would be to provide an environment where groups and individuals committed to specific issues could articulate their goals and be provided with support. Each forum would scope out key issues of concern which would be fed into the Resource Group, which itself would be responsible for looking at how the various issues raised could achieve commonality and work together, as well as expressing and honouring difference.
21. The idea of the forums is to enable a rich exchange of information, ideas and issues by individuals and groups where the concerns can be developed and taken forward. The forums would be able to work at their own pace, recognising that some groups may be more active or forward looking than others. This approach honours the diverse needs of individuals and groups within each forum, allowing them to identify their own work and issues, and prioritise them in a way which is meaningful to them.
22. It is also proposed that the forums would each nominate one member to sit on the Resource Group, with the remaining places being taken by representatives from Belonging Together, Law and Polity, Faith and Order and ecumenical partners and other identified stakeholders. This would be managed by the Connexional Team. The Resource Group would have a co-ordinating role, which would involve the discerning of issues and themes as a result of conversations it had with the Forums, honouring the fact that each equality stream is unique. The Resource Group would then begin to discern issues of commonality both in terms of practice and theology, with the aim being the articulation of a vision for equality and diversity by the Group which springs from the grassroots experience and concerns of individuals and groups.
23. Nominations from the forums to the Resource Group would take place as a result of careful conversation with informed, representative people around the Connexion. Clearly, expertise in a specific stream would be necessary, along with the ability to work sensitively and respectfully in an open minded manner with others.
24. Representation at the Methodist Council from Black and Minority Ethnic members will continue through nominations to the Methodist Council from the members of the Racial Justice Forum.
25. In view of this proposed new structure, the Council recommends that SO 336 should be suspended, so that the Committee for Racial Justice is not appointed for the Connexional year 2010–11, but that a Racial Justice Forum should both build on the work of the former Racial Justice Committee and indicate how

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new work on Racial Justice might be furthered in the coming years.

Proposals for Phase Two

26. It will be important for the proposals described in Phase One to be given time to bed down and begin to work effectively, for the various groups to learn how to work together productively, and for key strands of an overall approach and theology to begin to emerge. Once this has taken place (and it is suggested that a period of up to two years might be appropriate), these transitional arrangements could be replaced by an Equality and Diversity Stakeholder Forum consisting of circa 12 members. This group would be a key and influential resource, the aim of which is to support the work of the Equality and Diversity Officer across the Church, feeding in issues of concern and areas for development, including policy and theology. Accountability for the Forum would be via this post holder. This Forum would be supported by Open Networks which would have been developed by the thematic Forums established under the interim proposals.
27. The Equality and Diversity Forum will develop in a way which reflects the specific issues and requirements of the various stakeholders and interest groups, and will therefore generate its own agenda and ideas, determining the pace at which it works on specific issues, and further articulating the vision discerned by the earlier resource group.
28. As noted above, it is proposed that this group has a minimum of 12 members, six of whom will come from the earlier specialist stakeholder forums. The remaining seats would, as with the earlier group, be taken by specific representatives such as those from Law & Polity and Faith & Order Committees. However, as the equality and diversity work develops and gains confidence and influence, it is likely that the composition of the Forum will be reviewed, reflecting the desire to create a movement in which the Church has confidence, rather than a rigid structure.
29. However these second stage proposals are merely one option. During the next two years discussions and activities within the interim groups and the wider Church including the governance groups and with the E&D officer, will contribute to the discernment of what will be the most appropriate way of holding the work for the future.
30. Appendix 1 sets out the proposals as an organisational chart.

Conclusion

31. In seeking to encourage and equip the Methodist people to place God's justice at the heart of its life, the proposals in this report aim to encourage and enable local churches and the Connexion to develop strategies and structures that will keep within their purview the concerns of all communities and the whole Church. In working towards

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an inclusive Church it is recognised that proposals for the development of equality and diversity work need to honour the previous work of individuals, groups and committees, and the arrangements described in this report seek to do that. They also seek to foster a culture and approach in which the various equality streams will have confidence and will work at a pace appropriate to their needs and perspectives.

32. The proposals also aim to create an environment where issues and developments can be discerned at the grassroots level, and then be taken forward in an appropriate and

meaningful way, creating a movement which genuinely reflects local needs and concerns. The proposals also provide for equality and diversity issues to be developed in a genuinely inclusive and consultative way.

33. Resourcing the stakeholder forums of Phase One is estimated to cost around £30k which for the time being can be resourced from the current Equality and Diversity budget.
34. The proposed deletion of the first sentence of SO 361A is addressed in the report on Racism and Extreme Views found elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

***RESOLUTIONS

33/1. The Conference receives the Report.

33/2. The Conference suspends SO 336.

33/3. The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:

SO 102 Representatives of Connexional and Other Bodies.

- (1) The connexional committees, funds and institutions to be represented in the Conference pursuant to clause 14(2)(x) of the Deed of Union and the representation of each shall be as follows, any representative not otherwise identified being appointed by the body in question:

Body

- (i) Methodist Council

Representation

- (a) The chair of the council.
(b) The lead connexional Treasurer.
(c) The chair of the council's Strategy and Resources Committee.
(d) The Secretaries in the Connexional team (other than the assistant secretary of the Conference).

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- (e) One minister who is a commissioned chaplain.
 - (f) Two persons, each of whom is serving overseas under the direction of the council or is a minister or deacon whose ministry is based on an overseas District or is a lay person who is a member in such a District.
 - (g) **Six persons representing the concerns of racial justice**
 - One representative.
 - One representative.
 - One representative.
 - Six persons, at least two of whom should be under the age of 26.
- (ii) Faith and Order Committee
 - (iii) Law and Polity Committee
 - (iv) Stationing Committee
 - (v) Racial Justice Committee
 - (vi) *[deleted]*.....

SO 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 any appropriate funds ~~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.
- (2) To the extent that the trusts affecting the funds referred to in clause (1) above so require, grants may be made only to bodies having charitable status.

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Appendix 1

Proposal for interim architecture

Diagram 1: The Proposed E&D Architecture

