

The Unfinished Agenda - Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Stephen Poxon Chair of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee stephen.poxon@btopenworld.com
Resolutions	<p>53/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>53/2. The Council directs the Team to undertake further work on the collection of Equality Diversity and Inclusion profiling data of those in Full Connexion with the Conference.</p> <p>53/3. The Council, in making a report to the Conference on Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church invites the Conference to consider the following resolutions:</p> <p>(a) The Conference, in confessing the sin of racism and seeking to repent of that sin recognises the considerable amount of work still required of the whole connexion in order to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>(b) The Conference urges Districts, Circuits, Local Churches and appropriate connexional bodies to engage with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit.</p>

Summary of Content

Main Points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This report focuses on the sin of racism within the Methodist Church. Although work has been undertaken to remove it from the life of the Church it is with a deep sense of sorrow and shame that it is still evident today. 2. Section two maps a number of recurrent themes over a fifty year period; belonging and exclusion, assimilation, inclusive leadership and participation and tokenism, that are still applicable today. 3. Section three focuses on; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Initiating a conversation around a shared model of an inclusive Methodist Church. II. Presenting the challenges concerning the current statistical picture. III. Ensuring the leadership, personnel and ways of being and working of the Conference and all Connexional Committees and oversight bodies reflect the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. IV. Affirming a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential senior leaders of the Church.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Catechism for the Use of People called Methodists. • Faithful and Equal, Conference report, 1987. • Walton, H., Ward, R. and Johnson, M. A Tree God Planted, 1985. • Belonging Together 2012 Aim 2 Summary report. 2012. • The EDI Toolkit, 2016. • Called to Love and Praise, Conference Statement 1999. • Taking Forward the Larger than Circuit report (MC/17/11)
Consultations	Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Connexional Secretary, representatives from the Belonging Together Ministers Group, the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1 The Methodist Church has a long, active and pioneering tradition of engaging with social justice, challenging the assumptions of wider society. There are really good examples which can be held up by the Connexion as good practice; for example the One Programme and 3Generate which are rooted in the belief that participation of young people in the Church enables them, as well as the Church, to grow, learn and develop. Another example is the Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee where the members of the committee are diverse and balanced in regards to age, ethnicity and sex. This is a powerful statement on the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in the Church for those coming forward as candidates for ordained ministry.¹
- 1.2 Over the past fifty years, the composition of the Methodist Church membership has been changing and its diversity increasing. This diversity extends throughout the Connexion, but is perhaps most evident in the London District and also in some larger urban areas. In London, for example, it is estimated that more than 66% of the 22,500 plus members have their places of family origin outside of the UK.² However, though the aspiration for racial justice and inclusion has been implicit within the Church's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, within this period District Chairs have remained predominately male, aged 55 years and above and white.

A report to the Conference from 1978, which is today affirmed in Standing Order 013B that *'The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel, says: 'Racism is a sin and contrary to the imperatives of the Gospel. Biblically, it is against all that we perceive of the unmotivated, spontaneous and indiscriminating love of God who in Jesus Christ gave himself for all...'*³

- 1.3 This report focuses on the sin of racism within the Methodist Church. Although work has been undertaken over the past fifty years to remove it from the life of the Methodist Church it is with a deep sense of sorrow and shame that it is still evident today. The Methodist Church needs to be honest about what might be viewed as the gaping chasm between what it longs and hopes to be and the state of the present reality regarding the senior leadership of the Methodist Church

*'Sin is the condition of estrangement from God which affects the whole human race. Sins are specific actions, words or thoughts which arise from our sinful condition and deny the presence, power and purpose of God...Sin hinders the effects of God's grace. It corrupts our relationships with him and with one another, with the world in which we live and with ourselves. The effect of sin is discord, where God intended harmony.'*⁴

In regards to the sin of racism, in the 1987 report *Faithful and Equal*, the Methodist Church defines racism as:

*'Allowing prejudice to determine the way power is used to the personal, social or institutional detriment of ethnic minority individuals or communities.'*⁵

¹ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/guidance-and-reports>

² Based on research undertaken by the Belonging Together project 2010 – 2013

³ Watson, V., Holder, C. Statement supporting the Division of Social Responsibility Conference report 1978.

⁴ A Catechism for the Use of People called Methodists. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP).

⁵ Faithful and Equal, Conference report, 1987.

- 1.4 First identified in the report, *'A Tree God Planted'*, over the past fifty years, a number of recurrent themes have been evident. These are; belonging and exclusion, assimilation, inclusive leadership and participation and tokenism. The 1985 report, *'A Tree God Planted'* gathered data and stories to show the status and experiences of black people within British Methodism going back over twenty years prior to its publication. Therefore, the period being focused on in this report is 1965 – 2017. By mapping these themes over a fifty year period this report will show how the themes identified in 1985 are still applicable today, hence its title; *'The Unfinished Agenda'*.

Section 2: Recurrent Themes - Belonging and Exclusion, Assimilation, Inclusive Leadership and Participation and Tokenism

- 2.1 The focus of this section of the report is to take the themes; belonging and exclusion, assimilation, inclusive leadership and participation and tokenism and map them across the evidence gathered from four documents:

- *A Tree God Planted*⁶
- *Faithful and Equal*⁷
- *Belonging Together 2012 Aim 2 Summary report*^{8/9}
- *The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit – 'Race' Module (2016)*¹⁰

The purpose is to demonstrate how the issues surrounding these recurrent themes have acted as a barrier inhibiting racial justice and inclusion in the Methodist Church from 1965 to 2017.

2.2 Belonging and Exclusion

- i. *'When I came first and asked where was the nearest Methodist Church, I was told I couldn't come because of the colour of my skin. We started to have prayer meetings house to house on Sundays. We worshipped and we prayed. I think prayer breaks down barriers. Until one day I was told Revd. Hughes is the Minister and I could come. So I went and sat at the last seat at the back. The announcement was given 'We welcome any new people and hope you feel at home with us. Please come again.'*

This excerpt comes from *'A Tree God Planted'* and highlights how in the 1960s and 1970s many black people were not initially welcome in Methodist Churches.

- ii. Reflecting on the 1960 and 1970 *'Faithful and Equal'* exposed the stress points for churches with new arrivals:
'...The churches and society saw themselves as basically caring and capable of caring. They saw themselves as tolerant and liberal ...when churches found themselves meeting people and communities which were really different in skin colour, language, culture, religion, it became clear that they could no longer automatically serve their neighbourhood. They discovered that many of their members were prejudiced and afraid and looked for reasons to reject the newcomers...'

⁶ Walton, H., Ward, R. and Johnson, M. *A Tree God Planted*, 1985.

⁷ *Faithful and Equal*, Conference report, 1987.

⁸ *Belonging Together 2012 Aim 2 Summary report*. Research and map the experiences of people from under-represented backgrounds coming forward for leadership'. 2012.

⁹ The purpose of the *Belonging Together* project was *'To help the Methodist Church to be an effective plural church that engages its richly diverse membership to fulfil its vocation of worship and mission.'*

¹⁰ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit>

- iii. Though this situation is now rare, exclusion still occurs, the *'Belonging Together report'* from 2012 shows how exclusion has mutated from physically barring on the grounds of ethnicity and colour to cultural exclusion:
'Respondents argued that there is a high degree of attachment to inherited, culturally specific understandings of the church and that any change is often strongly resisted. This can serve to exclude groups who do not connect with British church tradition and can give the impression of prioritising structure and tradition over inclusiveness and welcome.'
- iv. This cultural exclusion is illustrated in Sita's story in the *'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit - 'Race' Module*:
'Sita has been a member of a local Methodist Church for nearly 10 years and is part of a sizeable Indian community within the church. Despite the length of time Sita has been a member, she has very little interaction with the white British community. Indeed, Indian Christians have been attending the church for 30 years and the communities remain virtually separate congregations within the church.

Only a couple of white British members know Sita's name and the minister is not one of them. The group are almost always referred to collectively, rather than as individuals, as 'the Indians'. This is difficult for members of the Indian community, but this label is also applied to anyone from an ethnic minority, of which there are multiple within the church.

Sita feels dehumanised by this treatment. Instead of feeling like part of the church she feels like an intruder. She is not sure how to tackle this as she does not want to upset either community but feels this cannot be Christian.'

2.3 Assimilation

- i. In *'A Tree God Planted'*, black Methodists spoke of experiencing spiritual hunger in British churches and felt that they were expected to assimilate or fit in with the existing culture:
'You go to church in the West Indies and you feel full – as if you have received a blessing. Most churches you go to here, you walk in, sit there for an hour and you go home empty... People spoke of taking a much more active part in worship: chanting, singing, encouraging the preacher with their comments. Often when these practices were followed in a British church, they caused embarrassments. 'If someone said Amen! They looked at you funny.'
- ii. This assimilation was evident in the *'Faithful and Equal 1987'* report:
'...The difficulty of recruiting black people for some church, circuit and district committees may reflect their perception of the nature and style of the working of those committees. Methodist groups often become cynical and 'maintenance orientated' to keep things ticking over for another year. In general, black communities tend to adopt a 'pilgrim approach'.
- iii. Assimilation was also a theme identified in the *'Belonging Together report 2012'*:
'Respondents reported being expected to assimilate into the church rather than a process of integration taking place. This results in members of under-represented groups feeling like outsiders in a church which 'belongs' to an established group. Respondents pointed to an expectation of losing their identity and assuming the existing one of 'British Methodists', rather than forming a new common identity.'
- iv. This is illustrated in the *'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit - 'Race' Module*: with Kofi's story:

'Kofi's Methodist church has had great success at building relationships within the church with the sharing of meals after services. Although this had proved popular, Kofi noticed that all the meals served are traditional British and attendance by members of ethnic minority communities was low. Kofi suggested that once a month one of the ethnic minority communities would prepare the food to encourage everyone to feel an equal part of the church.'

This idea was dismissed without any real discussion. One lay leader commented that, "We wouldn't be able to get the smell of your kind of food out of the church." Kofi has had a number of conversations with other church members about the ways in which the structure and practices of the church are informed by British culture. Some of the church members threatened to leave if different musical instruments were used during the service or if different prayers were used. The church leadership argued that the number of people in the church from ethnic minority groups was quite small and that the majority of church members had the right to decide how the church should be run. The makeup of the church membership, however, is not reflective of the wider community.'

2.4 Inclusive Leadership and Participation

- i. *'..One Minister told us how his white members befriended black people and welcomed them into the church. However, when it came to involving them in leadership "there was some opposition." Today, more than twenty years after black people first appeared in that church (where they form two thirds of the congregation), leadership still remains mainly in the hands of the white membership. What appears on the surface to be a successful multi-cultural congregation may in reality be one in which all the important decisions continue to be taken by white leaders.'*
- ii. This excerpt comes from 'A Tree God Planted', it would be hoped that stories like this would be confined to history. However, again this was highlighted in the 'Faithful and Equal' report in 1987:
'..A knock-on effect is the recognition that the representation of black people in Methodist leadership positions and structures is made more difficult by the nature and style of working that Methodism adopts. It is crucial that the positive contribution of the black communities actually enriches and changes our procedures and affects how things are normally done...'
- iii. In 2012 the theme of inclusive leadership and participation continued to resonate. One of the driving forces and areas of concern for the Belonging Together Project was 'The lack of sufficient minority ethnic group participation within the Church's decision-making and leadership structures'. This theme was also identified in the 'Belonging Together report':
'Explicit discrimination still exists with the Church. The research has highlighted examples of individuals being excluded from leadership or prevented from undertaking specific roles or tasks based on their ethnicity. Assumptions are made about the skills and abilities of individuals based on race, and instances were found of existing leaders refusing to work with people different from themselves....'
- iv. Martyna's story taken from the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit - 'Race' Module: also illustrates the issues around inclusive leadership and participation:
'Martyna, a lay member of a local Methodist church, feels called into leadership within the church. She has had a number of conversations with fellow church members about the possibility of taking up a leadership role. She is a senior manager in a government department, managing a significant budget and several teams of staff.'

A number of roles have become available in the last year, but in each case, the first Martyna heard of them was when someone else was appointed. The vacancies were not announced during services, and no notices or signs were put up. Individuals were appointed by the existing leadership team. There is a group of around 20 people who have all been members for a long time and are all friends. Leadership roles seem to pass between them with no 'outsiders' given the opportunity to join.'

2.5 Tokenism

- i. Another theme which was identified in the 'A Tree God Planted', report is tokenism:

'..Today it is widely conceded that different groups and interests should be represented when decision-making takes place. Yet we know from other contexts that the inclusion of a 'token' woman in a group of men, or a 'token' black person in a predominately white assembly, may only serve to legitimise the deliberations of that body and inhibit its development on a more equitable basis.

Tokenism operates within the Methodist Church when black people are elected into office because they are black but then not given the means of support they need to exercise their leadership role effectively. It also takes place when the position of one black person in a responsible post serves as reassurance that the congregation can welcome black people into leadership when in fact the majority are not involved at all in the business of the church. Tokenism can also be seen when a black person becomes a leader but then is expected to undertake the leadership role as if s/he came from a white cultural background.'

- ii. This theme was also identified in the 'Belonging Together report':

'Some success has been achieved by making people leaders based on their belonging to specific groups within the congregation, but it is important that this doesn't simply obscure the problem. These roles can become tokenistic, creating difficulties for the individual and providing no real benefit to wider groups.'

- iii. Thomas' Story in the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit - 'Race' Module: also illustrates this issue:

'Thomas has long had a passion for mission and ministry with children and young people. Although he has been made a steward, he feels that he is treated as merely a Black and minority ethnic representative. Important decisions are taken before meetings take place and Thomas' input is only sought in matters, which are seen to relate to ethnic minority groups. The church recently created a team to look at ways that it could improve its provision for young people, but the team was formed at an informal meeting to which Thomas wasn't invited. Thomas was, therefore, denied the opportunity to join the group – a group which is noticeably lacking in diversity.

Thomas feels a great deal of pressure because he is the only representative of very diverse groups within the church and he doesn't feel able to represent every viewpoint. Increasingly, he is becoming reluctant to raise too many issues. He fears any issues he raises would be used to argue against any further progress. He is becoming increasingly concerned having heard members of the church express the view that having one steward representing different groups has resolved the problem of a lack of diversity in the leadership of the church.'

- 2.6 In summary, this section of the report has shown the issues and challenges for racial justice and inclusion within the Methodist Church that the sin of racism continues in the life of the Church.

Section Three: Towards an Inclusive Church

3.1 The evidence in section two of this report identifies the issues and recurring themes; the focus of this section of the report is to affirm and identify actions and solutions. Though this report concerns racial justice and inclusion, in working through the issues, it is apparent that many of these resonate with other equality and diversity strands. Therefore, the recommendations identified take a wider perspective around equality, diversity and inclusion. In a recent report to the Stationing Committee the Assistant Secretary of the Conference said concerning leadership and diversity, that what is needed is an **intentional approach** which is **based on objectivity** and **rooted in our ethos and values**. Building on these pillars, this report focuses on the following four areas:

- Initiating a conversation around a shared model of an inclusive Methodist Church.
- Presenting the challenges concerning the current statistical picture relating to the age, disability, ethnic and the sex composition of the membership of the Methodist Church and its leadership
- Ensuring that all possible steps are taken so that the leadership, personnel and ways of being and working of the Conference and all Connexional Committees and oversight bodies.
- Affirming a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential senior leaders of the Church.

3.2. Initiating a conversation around a shared model of an inclusive Methodist Church

- i. Reflecting on the themes identified in section 2 of this report it is clear that the Methodist Church has been on a journey concerning racial justice and inclusion. In the 1960s and 1970s, the journey was from a model of rejection to one of assimilation. Since then, there have been a number of responses to inclusion across the Connexion, variations of; Assimilation, Melting Pot Approaches or Tolerance:
 - **Assimilation** – Kofi’s story in section 2 of this report illustrates how this model operates, black and global majority (BGM) people are expected to be absorbed into host churches, adopting the hosts ways and losing their own distinctiveness. Though there has been a great deal of work to move away from this model in many multi-cultural churches, assimilation is still evident when BGM people are a significant minority.
 - **The Melting Pot Approaches**– The idealism of this approach presumes that different ethnic, cultural or national groups will ‘melt or blend together’ into a harmonious whole losing their distinctiveness and developing a new common culture. However, in practice, this can lead to conflict with groups unwilling to lose their identity and distinctiveness. Or faced with change groups leaving the church and there is always the question of power and the improbability of those groups in power simply blending in.
 - **Tolerance** – This is a significant model in the Methodist Church’s journey towards inclusion, with difference permitted to exist separately, we see this in the case of Methodist churches which take on a particular ethnic or national identity. However, the challenge to this model is that separate existence can lead to fracture and apartheid.

ii. The Enrichment Model

The models above embody both a separateness from each other and therefore God, an alternative model of inclusion which has more in common with the emphasis on

relatedness within Methodist ecclesiology is the **Enrichment** model, the 1985 'A Tree God Planted', report began to develop the early stages of this model.

'A plural community is one in which different groups are free to maintain their own traditions rather than adopt a standard form of behaviour. Because acknowledgement is made of the fact that each group has distinctive gifts to offer, a form of equality develops which is based on sharing rather than conforming to a dominate ethos.'

The Enrichment model focuses on gifts rather than threats, affirming relationships of mutuality. However, further work is needed on the Enrichment model to root it in the value and ethos of the Church. Key questions that need to be answered are:

- How can the Church ensure that difference in the life of the Church is mutually enriching?
- What intentional activities are needed to build a plural community where different ethnicities and national groups and identities bring their gifts to the Church and what are the challenges?
- What needs to change in the Church for this process to be mutually beneficial?
- If one of the key indicators for the success of this model is that senior leadership should both reflect inclusivity and be inclusive, what are the current implications for the senior leadership of the Church?

3.3 Presenting the challenges concerning the current statistical picture relating to the age, disability, ethnic and the sex composition of the Methodist Church and leadership

Currently, the Methodist Church does not routinely gather statistics relating to the ethnic composition of the Church or general equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) demographic data on age, disability and sex as part of Statistics for Mission. It is also difficult to draw conclusions about Church leadership as not all EDI data is gathered for this group. What is known and what is not known is:

- Only 10 per cent of representatives of the Methodist Conference are from black and global majority (BMG) groups.
- The Church does not collate data on disability or ethnicity for Presbyters and Deacons.
- In 2014, 88 per cent of District Chairs were 50 and over, 73 per cent were male.
- 83 per cent of superintendents were over 50 years old and 75 per cent were male. While some of the senior leadership of the Methodist Church have entered leadership without being Superintendents ministers, most have been. The role of Superintendent Minister can be seen as a gateway position for leadership in the Methodist Church.
- The Chairs of Committees are predominately white and male.
- The data for the Connexional Team Senior Leadership Group shows that 60 per cent are male and 100 per cent are white.

Anecdotally, there is awareness that the main area of growth occurring in the Church is within black and global majority (BGM) communities and this is echoed across Christian Churches in the UK with the phenomenal growth of the Black Majority Churches. Research carried out by the Church of England in 2012 unearthed extraordinary statistics about the number of BGM Christians and the growth of new churches. This research demonstrates the value of gathering this type of data. ¹¹

¹¹ Goodhew, D. 2012. Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present. Ashgate Contemporary Ecclesiology

Black and Global Majority in the Methodist Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% BGM at Conference • 3% BGM District Chairs • 66% BGM in London District
Black Majority Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500,000 Christians in BM churches • At least 5,000 new churches since 1980
Black and Global Majority Christian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One million BGM Christians in Britain

It is recommended that in the first instance that further work be carried out on the collection of EDI profiling data of those in Full Connexion with the Conference.

3.4 Ensuring that all possible steps are taken so that the leadership, personnel and ways of being and working of the Conference and all connexional committees and oversight bodies reflect the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

One of the key areas where the Methodist Church needs to ensure that there is better inclusion of BGM people is at the Methodist Conference, the ultimate decision making body of the Church. The EDI Committee has written to District Chairs and Synod Secretaries reminding them of the requirements of Standing Order 417(2) with regard to district representatives to the Conference:

(2) Subject to clause (2B) below the election shall be made by the Synod by ballot vote after nomination. In electing such representatives members of Synod shall have regard for the composition of the membership of the District as a whole with regard to age, sex and ethnic origin.

The lack of diversity and inclusion and in particular a BGM presence on the platform of the Conference needs to be reflected on, as symbolically this speaks volumes and is not a reflection of God's realm. In addition, the church needs to ensure that it takes account of inclusion when conferring. If justice is what love looks like in public, then the Methodist Church has a long way to go. Leadership needs to ensure that diversity in its fullest sense is taken into account in conferring and decision-making across the Connexion.

3.5 To develop a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential leaders of the Church

The EDI Toolkit is now available and the EDI Committee will be monitoring its take up within the Connexion. Significant resources were expended in creating the EDI Toolkit, the purpose of which is to provide a learning experience that can be easily used in local situations to support local Churches and Circuits in positively engaging with equality, diversity and inclusion. The toolkit has been developed in an accessible modular format and can be accessed via the Methodist Church website, the aim is to continue to add to its resources. In addition, targeted unconscious bias development has been offered to the following Committees and sub-committees; Strategy and Resources, Complaints and Discipline Panel, Stationing Matching, Ministries, Connexional Grants and Safeguarding. Currently, work is underway to include this as a module in the EDI Toolkit.

However, as identified in the *'Taking forward Larger than Circuit'* report (MC/17/11), the EDI Committee is also concerned with the lack of diversity and inclusion within the leadership of the Church. Within Methodism it is the whole people of God through the relevant decision-making bodies who make decisions about the life of the Methodist Church.¹² Leadership is exercised at all levels of the Church, this includes the; President and Vice President, District Chairs, Chairs of Committees, District leadership teams, Circuit Leadership teams, Local Church Councils and the Connexional Team Senior Leadership Group. Though there are differing selection methods for leadership groups; by appointment, voted upon, nominated and recruited there remains an issue of diversity.

Therefore, the EDI Committee welcomes the development of a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential candidates for appointment as a District Chair, but sees this as a first step in the development of inclusive leadership within the Church and would urge the Conference to take similar action concerning other leadership roles and positions in the Church.

The EDI Committee recognises the value of the 'Germinate Leadership' Programme in the *'Taking forward Larger than Circuit'* report (MC/17/11). To ensure both future leadership is inclusive and understands the dynamics of inclusivity, equality and diversity in the Church, modules need to be specifically developed to include this.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 53/1. The Council receives the report.**
- 53/2. The Council directs the Team to undertake further work on the collection of Equality Diversity and Inclusion profiling data of those in Full Connexion with the Conference.**
- 53/3. The Council, in making a report to the Conference on Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church, invites the Conference to consider the following resolutions:**
- (a) The Conference, in confessing the sin of racism and seeking to repent of that sin recognises the considerable amount of work still required of the whole connexion in order to achieve greater equality, diversity and inclusion.**
 - (b) The Conference urges Districts, Circuits, Local Churches and appropriate connexional bodies to engage with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit.**

¹² Called to Love and Praise, 1999 4.6.6