20.   Stationing Committee

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1.   Introduction

1.1   The year commenced with a meeting of the chairs and support staff of the Stationing Committee, the Ministries Committee, the Network Committee and the Faith & Order Committee to establish and agree areas of common concern and agree strategies for dealing with them, hopefully leading to a more effective focus on the work of the Church.

1.2   The Stationing Committee has met on three occasions during this connexional year and will gather for its final meeting of the year at the Conference to address all outstanding issues pertinent to the adoption of the stations. Our business has been centred on facilitating the stationing process and taking stock of experience gained from those participating in the process. It is always our central objective to discern how we can utilise our resources to the greater benefit of the Connexion.

1.3   This year has brought its particular challenges as we faced a greater demand for presbyters than we have available. In direct contrast to this we have faced a situation where we are blessed with a greater number of probationers and deacons than we had stations available and we would express our grateful appreciation for the way Circuits and Districts have responded to this situation. We would also specifically express our thanks to the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, Deacon Susan Culver, and the Ministerial Co-ordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries, the Revd Dr Sheryl Anderson, for the hard work that has been done to reconcile numbers.

1.4   We are grateful to the Methodist Diaconal Order as we gradually move to a closer relationship between the stationing of presbyters and deacons and the protocols affecting this process. Further details are included later in the report; however, this will continue to develop with the harmonising of the processes and timetables during the coming year.

1.5   This harmonisation has included the development of a joint application form for a presbyteral or diaconal probationer and a joint circuit profile form for presbyteral and diaconal appointments for ordained ministers in order to ensure greater parity in the stationing process. The profile forms to be completed by ordained deacons and presbyters from 2014 onwards are now also much better aligned.

1.6   With the current shortages of presbyters there is an increased demand by Circuits to utilise the continued ministry of supernumeraries. There is guidance available for Circuits and this is being reviewed.

1.7   The stationing of presbyters to the Connexional Team as part of the development of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network has impacted on our processes this year as the structure becomes established and we continue to monitor the situation

as the new pathways for training become established and we can assess the implications for stationing.

1.8   The Committee had conversations with the Coordinator of the Methodist City Centre Network (MCCN) in order to identify needs and priorities associated with the special circumstances that this particular ministry will demand.

2.   Stationing Matching Group

2.1   The Stationing Matching Group (chaired by the Revd David Emison) met in November, December and January to arrange matches between presbyters and circuits. Following the first matching meeting, 80% of matches led to invitations being offered by Circuits and accepted by presbyters, after the second 86% and after the third 86%. Following the January meeting of the Stationing Matching Group all remaining matches are dealt with by the Stationing Action Group. The Stationing Committee has approved a closer harmonisation of presbyteral and diaconal stationing (see Section 6 for further details) that will come into effect in the connexional year 2014/15. Each year's round of stationing matching highlights issues that need to be addressed; some of these are essentially matters of process and can be dealt with by the Stationing Matching Group whilst others are matters of policy and principle and need to be dealt with by the Stationing Committee.

3.   Initial Stationing Sub-Committee

3.1   The Initial Stationing Sub-Committee (also chaired by the Revd David Emison) met in January and matched 44 student presbyters and 6 presbyters from other conferences and denominations seeking to serve the Methodist Church in Britain as 'recognised and regarded' to appropriate appointments. Prior to the meeting each of the appointments had been approved by the Initial Stationing Scrutiny Panel. For the first time this year it was agreed that the sub-committee would meet for a 24-hour period to ensure that greater care could be taken over each appointment. The members of the sub-committee believe that this led to a more effective outcome and that in future the time allowed for this task should reflect the number of students to be matched to appointments. A significant piece of work undertaken during the year has been the identification of the principles and protocols which govern all the processes within initial stationing to ensure proper accountability, fairness and transparency. Following the report of a working group appointed by the Stationing Committee it has been agreed that the initial stationing of presbyters and deacons should be much more closely harmonised (see Section 6).

4.   The Stationing Action Group

4.1   The Stationing Action Group (convened by the Revd Anne Brown) commenced its work on 10 February 2014 and will continue through to the 2014 Conference. At the beginning of the process there were thirty available appointments, including six superintendencies, ten presbyters and one presbyter seeking to serve the Methodist Church in Britain as 'recognised and regarded' available for stationing.

4.2 After the first Stationing Action Group conference call in February, two matches were made and an appointment was reconfigured for the presbyter seeking to serve the Methodist Church in Britain as 'recognised and regarded'.

4.3 The second Stationing Action Group in March received three new presbyteral profiles and made three matches, of which two have been successful.

4.4 At the time of writing, eight presbyters remain to be stationed, some of whom have severe geographical limitations and two are non-car-drivers. After 31 March when Circuits may seek to withdraw their appointments from stationing, it looks likely that there will be around 16 appointments available – spread across the Connexion – but not necessarily natural matches for the remaining presbyters.

5. Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee

5.1 There were 31 deacons available for stationing for September 2014. This included five deacons (three of whom were probationers) married to presbyters also in stationing, and sixteen probationer deacons in total.

5.2 The process commenced with 22 appointments, including 3 part-time appointments to be filled. A further nine appointments (including two part-time appointments) were opened making a total of thirty-one appointments including five part-time appointments available. During the process, one full-time and four part-time appointments were withdrawn with the permission of the Stationing Committee.

5.3 As of March 2014, four deacons have yet to be stationed – one deacon married to a presbyter, two deacons with severely restricted geographical deployability (one of whom is a probationer) and a further probationer deacon.

5.4 The Stationing Committee would like to encourage Circuits to think about diaconal ministry and the possibility of creating diaconal appointments as they consider their strategic staffing needs.

6. Changes to the process and timing of initial and diaconal stationing

6.1 In January 2013, the Stationing Committee established a small group to take forward a wider discussion regarding the process and timing of initial stationing and diaconal stationing.

6.2 The group met twice. Its wide-ranging discussions included the initial stationing process employed in January 2014, the significant number of profiles for probationer appointments that were returned to Circuits pending enquiries and the number of appointments that had been reshaped into probationer appointments.

6.3 The group noted concerns that although Superintendents and candidates are required to sign a C1(a) form to confirm that they have discussed the "terms and conditions of service under which [the candidate] might serve" (including availability for stationing), the implications of this are not always fully understood.

6.4 The group also noted that the MDO has previously required that all diaconal appointments should be suitable for both ordained and probationer deacons unless there are extenuating circumstances, but that it is vital to ensure the necessary support and supervision in probationer appointments.

6.5 The review group brought proposals to the meeting of the Stationing Committee in February 2014, which were intended to achieve greater harmonisation between prebsyteral and diaconal stationing processes. The following changes were agreed and have been incorporated within the Code of Practice:

    i. Superintendent ministers must explain to prospective presbyteral and diaconal candidates the meaning and implications of stationing by the Conference. Training for these conversations should be built into Superintendents' Conferences and the Handbook for Superintendents;

    ii. District Chairs should discuss with ministerial couples which stationing route would best suit their circumstances; that is, whose ministry should take priority in determining a suitable appointment. The outcomes of these conversations should be recorded in writing, noting that the Church cannot guarantee to find suitable appointments for both partners or to fund an additional year of training;

    iii. It should be assumed that in a ministerial couple where one partner is a probationer, the stationing of the probationer will take priority for the duration of their probation, as to do otherwise is to suspend their period of formation. Conversations around timing should begin prior to candidating to avoid curtailments;

    iv. Student ministers (diaconal and presbyteral) will be allocated to appointments in early January;

    v. Stationing of any partner ordained deacon or presbyter will then take place subsequently;

    vi. The same level of scrutiny should be given to diaconal probationer appointments as to presbyteral probationer appointments;

    vii. From 2014/15 onwards, student deacons and student presbyters should be allocated to appointments at the same residential initial stationing meeting in January. Student deacons should be represented by their learning institution;

    viii. There should be one scrutiny panel for diaconal and presbyteral probationer appointments, which should meet on two occasions. The Warden should be included on the panel;

    ix. Ordained deacons should be matched at the first meeting of the Stationing Matching Group. One of the nine rounds should be a diaconal round. The Warden and a member of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee should attend. The Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee should continue to provide an advisory function for the Warden;

x.   Any paperwork to be made available online for both deacons and presbyters should be available through the Methodist Church website.

6.6   These discussions highlighted the need for further work on profile forms, which is now being undertaken.

7.   Code of Practice

7.1   The Stationing Committee once again wishes to express its gratitude to the small group consisting of Kate Woolley, Iain Henderson and Peter Sercombe who brought to the committee proposed revisions to the Code of Practice and Summary of the Stationing Process.

7.2   Changes were made in the light of feedback from those who have recently been involved in the invitation and stationing process. This is necessary and valued as it enables the committee to assess experiences and make any necessary changes or give further guidance. Following requests for further clarity on how to conduct visits and on the content of the Letter of Understanding for probationer presbyters, additional guidance is included in this year's review of the Code.

7.3   This year the significant changes in the Code relate to the amendments to SO 545 and 546 with particular reference to the procedure at the Circuit Meeting when an extension to a minister's invitation is being considered.

7.4   The review of the principles and protocols governing initial stationing for presbyters and changes in the process and timing of determining the recommendations for diaconal stationing (see Section 6) have also resulted in changes.

8.   Projections

8.1   Work has been resumed on stationing projections – although such projections can never be entirely accurate, they have been found to be helpful in planning for the future (see Appendix).

***RESOLUTION

20/1. The Conference adopted the Report.

Appendix – Stationing projections

NUMBER OF ACTIVE METHODIST PRESBYTERS IN FULL CONNEXION

Connexional Year	Actual 2011/12	Actual 2012/13	Actual 2013/14	Estimate 2014/15	Estimate 2015/16	Estimate 2016/17
Start of Year	1750	1685	1675	1641	1592	1554
Normal Retirements[1]	110	64	62	73	63	54
Early Retirements	10	9	10	10	10	10
Resignations	5	12	5	5	5	5
Other Losses	5	0	5	5	5	5
TOTAL LOSSES	130	85	82	93	83	74
New Probationers	60	51	43	39	40	40
Other Gains	5	7	5	5	5	5
TOTAL GAINS	65	58	48	44	45	45
END OF YEAR	1685	1658	1641	1592	1554	1525

NUMBER OF ACTIVE METHODIST DEACONS IN FULL CONNEXION

Connexional Year	Actual 2013/14	Estimate 2014/15	Estimate 2015/16	Estimate 2016/17
Start of Year	132	140	146	148
Retirements	5	1	1	1
Resignations	1	0	0	1
Other Losses	1	1	2	1
TOTAL LOSSES	7	2	3	3
New Probationers	15	8	5	8
Other Gains	0	0	0	0
TOTAL GAINS	15	8	5	8
END OF YEAR	140	146	148	153

[1] Based on Normal State Pension Age