

31. General Secretary's Report

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Martyn Atkins generalsecretary@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolution	As set out in the Report.
Subject and Aims	To present to the Conference a report relating to the roles of the General Secretary of the Methodist Church as outlined in SO 300

After several years in post it is inevitably the case that much of the work in which I have been involved appears in various places in the *Agenda* of the Conference and other governance and leadership bodies of our Connexion. The role of the General Secretary involves participation in many of the forums that produce material on behalf of the Connexion. Therefore this report focuses mainly on work and themes not found in other reports to the Conference.

1. I pay tribute to the many people, lay and ordained, who serve the Connexion with competence, grace and huge generosity of time in a large number of groupings and committees.
2. From late September to December 2013 I benefitted from a sabbatical: a gift of the Church to its ministers for which I am deeply grateful. As it was designed to do, it afforded me a changed tempo of life permitting time for reflection about my own discipleship, ministry and the future. Like almost all sabbaticals mine was made possible by other people. I am deeply grateful to my close colleagues who not only encouraged me to take a (belated) sabbatical but also enabled me to do so by their own competence and readiness to take on considerable extra work over that period.
3. Part of my work for each of the past few years including this year has been involved in processes relating to redundancies and curtailments, walking alongside those who both administer such processes and those who are affected by them. I pay tribute to all those – lay and ordained – in a number of contexts in the Connexion who have been through such processes over the last year, some of them administering the very processes that profoundly affect their own lives and work.

Reporting the work of the Connexional Team

4. Subsequent upon the debate at the Conference last year regarding the ending of a dedicated report about the work of the Connexional Team some information is included here. The Strategy and Resources Committee is responsible for the oversight of the senior members of the Connexional Team, and routinely hold them properly accountable for the work of the whole Team, and share in the evolution of the work plan of the Team.
5. Over recent months, through collegial processes, the Team has reasserted its shared values through a renewed vision statement: *The vision for the Connexional Team is to be a highly professional and distinctively Christian workforce to assist the Methodist Church in furthering its purposes, in particular enabling it better to fulfil its calling of responding to God's love in Christ and working out its discipleship in mission and worship.*
6. Below is a *small sample* of the work of the Connexional Team over this past year, cluster by cluster.

The Mission and Advocacy Cluster

7. The work of the Joint Public Issues Team has focused on Foodbanks, Nuclear non-proliferation, and (particularly for the Methodist Church) material relating to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions briefing. In recent times work relating to the potential implications of the *Lobbying Bill* (The Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act) upon charities including churches has been recognised to be necessary.
8. Materials relating to *A Generous Life* have been and will continue to be produced. In recent times, material produced in partnership with *Roots* magazine designed to support churches reflecting upon living generosity as part of their ongoing discipleship has been published.
9. Methodist Publishing operations are now undertaken by Norwich Books and Music. This simple sentence signals the ending of operations in Peterborough and the posts of the faithful staff who administered them. The Conference will undoubtedly want to thank the former Connexional Team staff of Methodist Publishing for their faithful service, and also the Connexional Team staff whose hard work, commitment and care enabled this transition to occur as it did.
10. The work of our Media Team is often unsung, but their careful promotion of the work and witness of the Connexion, and their valuable assistance in helping to manage complex and challenging news stories concerning the life of the Church is rightly recognised here.
11. The 200th anniversary of Methodist missionary societies celebrated in Leeds last October, was a fitting time to reflect on our heritage, to give thanks for the work of the Methodist Missionary Society and to offer a launch-pad for bringing *One Mission* deeper into the heart and soul of contemporary Methodism. Arising from our commitment to *One Mission* I have invited the World Church specialists in the Connexional Team to formulate a vision and strategy paper about the future evolution of our work in partnership and mission as part of a world Methodist family, and they have responded positively and enthusiastically. This work is still at its earliest stages, and the paper will be honed and shaped in conversation and consultation with various leadership, management and governance groupings over the course of the coming connexional year, with a view to bringing proposals to a future Conference as soon as possible.

The Governance Support Cluster

12. Work relating to the oversight of candidates and student and probationer ministers has become the responsibility of the Governance Support staff, bringing it alongside related work on behalf of the Conference.
13. The ecumenical subscriptions budget has been the subject of reflection and scrutiny, undertaken with our main partners who have been gracious and understanding. As a result our ecumenical subscriptions have been reduced to an overall level agreed by the Methodist Council.
14. The regular work of the Cluster, providing support to colleagues in the Connexional Team and members of many other committees in order to sustain our challenging annual cycle of governance and management has continued to be given with patience, expertise and grace.

The Discipleship and Ministries Cluster

15. The Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network began officially on 1 September 2013. Behind this simple statement lies a huge amount of hard work, challenging decisions, farewells and welcomes. Any change process involves navigation which becomes the focus for learning for the future. To all those affected in whatever way I express the deep gratitude of the Church for patience, grace and commitment to the continuing journey which is so full of potential.
16. The Network as part of the Cluster can now contribute positively and energetically to connexional life, providing a dispersed Connexional Team and offering new models of working between the Team, Districts, Circuits and Local Churches. More than its paid staff, the Network is an example of our connexional nature. It allows the Church to partner with Cliff College and the Queen's Foundation, and enables the growing number of district and circuit based staff and volunteers to contribute to the learning and development of the whole Church.
17. Evidence of the fruits of this way of working can already be seen in several ways: in work that has begun with the Ministries Committee on a new pioneer pathway which connects us to some of the wellsprings of our early history as a movement; in how the *local preacher worship leader* pathway is being taken forward within the context of developments of local ministry pathways, and in how initial ministerial formation and training is beginning to embed quickly into new and fertile patterns.
18. The Cluster has also welcomed a new post of Director of Education which enables significant development of decisions made by the Conference in recent years. The location of this post and the VentureFX work within the Cluster allows for a greater flow of ideas and creative thinking through the Network and the whole people of God in the Methodist Church.

The Support Services Cluster

19. Successful implementation of new IT systems is well underway and the aim of enabling dispersed Team staff to connect effectively is improving all the time.
20. Support for an ever-increasing number of grant applications has been provided, indicating that a large number of gospel configured possibilities are being discerned and realised.
21. The Statement of Accounts and Annual Report received very positive comments. It is pleasing that this document, telling as it does a more comprehensive story of the life of the Connexion than 'mere' numbers outlined in various places, is being valued and used.

The Office of the General Secretary

22. There has been an inevitable increase in workload generated this year by a combination of extra work arising from the Conference and the Council, and prolonged absence through illness of a senior member of staff.
23. My colleague the Connexional Secretary has attended a number of Circuit Meetings in various parts of the Connexion, as well as meeting regularly with Chairs of District to ensure the Team receives feedback and seeks to live closely connected to the life of the wider Connexion.

24. Together with a group of others, mainly former Chairs of Districts or past Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Conference, I have participated in ensuring that Chairs of District have undertaken Ministerial Development Reviews. I am grateful to all involved in this enriching and necessary process. This past year as each year I have undergone my own ministerial and 'professional' development review process.

Relationship building

25. Over the course of the past months I have been privileged to be involved in a small way in the discussions, reflections and consultations resulting in the Methodist Relief and Development Fund becoming *All We Can: Methodist Relief and Development*. The deepening practical partnership between *All We Can* and aspects of work led by our World Church Relationships team is exciting and welcome.
26. A significant part of the role of the General Secretary is to engage in 'outward focused' work on behalf of the Connexion. Consequently I have continued to meet regularly with senior colleagues in other Christian denominations in the UK including the Baptist Union, the Church of England, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, the Free Churches Group, the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the United Reformed Church. Alongside these rich 'traditional' ecumenical relationships I have also continued to respond to various invitations to participate at national events, including those of a leading black majority Church and the annual conference of the Pioneer Network of Churches: the newer, equally rich and potent context of ecumenism today.
27. The deepening partnerships in mission and ministry with both historic and newer ecumenical partners remain a vital element of our life as a Connexion today and I believe will continue to be so. They require our continuing courage and commitment to change as they inevitably pose real but proper challenges to our own processes and polity in various respects.
28. In the context of partnerships and relationships I return to a theme referred to briefly in my report to the 2013 Conference: the increasingly diverse nature of our Connexion. This is not only manifest in established and newer ecumenical partnerships but also in the growing number of language and/or ethnically configured Methodist congregations and fellowships now found in very many parts of our Connexion.
29. Recognition of a rich and varied world Methodism living in the territories making up our Connexion is not new: migration 'from everywhere to everywhere' - including migration of Methodist Christians - has been recognised for a long time. Increasing numbers of local Methodist churches in our Connexion are enriched by the rainbow nature of a world Methodist family. Some share premises with or 'host' congregations of Christians in Methodist and Wesleyan traditions. Some know of Methodist groupings in their communities who have little or no connection with local Methodist churches and Circuits. Some groupings of Methodist and 'Wesleyan' Christians from around the world are assembling unknown to us - and sometimes also unknown to their 'home' Conferences.
30. Our Connexion has responded in various ways to our increasing diversity. One significant example is that we have encouraged and supported 'Fellowship Groups' of Methodists from, for example, Fiji, Ghana, Korea, Nigeria and Zimbabwe – to name but a few. We have encouraged and enabled the appointment of 'chaplains' to some of them. Gatherings have taken place, bringing together those Methodist ministers, pastors and leaders we know of

who lead Chinese speaking congregations, for example. This is necessarily sensitive, nuanced and relational work, and is sought to be undertaken in that way.

31. Several developments and many conversations combine to suggest that the time is right actively to seek how deepening relationships, mutual partnerships and a genuine integration which shapes anew each and all of us living in the wonderful plurality which is our Connexion today, might occur.
32. Our commitment to *One Mission* suggests the time is right, as does our continuing and deepening relationships with the United Methodist Church and as part of this our careful and continuing re-exploring of the implications of our historic concordat. Similarly, our Memorandum of Understanding with the Korean Methodist Church signed in 2007 suggests the time is right; as does our continuing commitment to and participation in the World and European Methodist Councils. Critically our specialists in the World Church Relationships team in the Connexional Team have urged for some time that a fuller and more urgent exploration of our life together is needed.
33. Learning arising from the legacy of the *Belonging Together* project and strongly encouraged by those responsible for leading on issues relating to Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion is relevant here (and indeed relevant to many other contexts of the life of our Church). Over recent months a modest research project has taken place involving meeting ordained and lay leaders of several 'Fellowship Groups', and some of those who relate most closely to them. The project report suggests the following:
 - a. There is significant diversity among the Fellowship Groups in terms of organisation, structure and purpose. Here as so often in relation to our life together one size will not fit all. Nevertheless there are some common themes to which general and helpful responses can be made.
 - b. Language is important. It is not that many members of Fellowship Groups cannot speak English well; rather it is to note the significance of worshipping God in a 'mother tongue'. Equally cultural identity is important and members of Fellowship Groups often experience cultural distance and dissonance in relation to worship styles and ways of 'being church' encountered in some British Methodist contexts.
 - c. Some Fellowship Groups are a key means of evangelism, mainly but not exclusively among those who share the same language and/or cultural heritage or identity. They can serve as a point of entry into a Methodist environment when the distance to more 'traditional' British Methodist worship and church life appears too great to traverse. They are places of welcome for those who have been hurt by previous experiences of Methodist (and other denominational) church life.
 - d. They are often significant places of nurture and training for the children of their members: though we should note the tension felt by some parents in relation to their children attending fellowship meetings and the importance of integration between fellowships and churches.
 - e. Like a good deal of contemporary British formal Christianity the Fellowships gather people from beyond Methodism: a common language and/or ethnicity often being more significant than a denominational identity or allegiance.

- f. Fellowship Groups usually expect members to attend both a local Methodist church and the Fellowship itself (somewhat reminiscent of earliest Methodism). Fellowship members feel more acutely than most Methodists the pull (in terms of loyalty, time and finance) between belonging to a Local Church or Circuit and a Fellowship Group, and often travel considerable geographical distances to sustain live connection to both.
 - g. Some Fellowship Group leaders comment that the Groups and their members make a significant contribution to the life of the Local Church(es) to which they relate, but note this is not always recognised, particularly in relation to contributing to leadership in Local Churches. Fellowship Groups are not regarded as 'Local Churches' and therefore stand outside the circuit system.
 - h. For many members of Fellowship Groups (as with wider Methodism) there is little knowledge of structures beyond the local group. Leadership is often associated mainly with local group leadership – and in some cases, the 'national' leadership of the Fellowship Group – rather than Methodist structures of circuit, district etc.
 - i. There is some lack of clarity about who provides ministerial oversight to whom, when and where. Conversely, Methodist ministers in pastoral charge of churches associated with Fellowship Group congregations sometimes comment that they have little idea of the type of 'teaching' the members are receiving. Different leadership styles are recognised and acknowledged.
 - j. Some leaders of Fellowship Groups express frustration that training and/or status gained in other Conferences is not recognised and that some training has to be done 'all over again' before authorisation in a British Methodist context is possible, and when undertaken involves effectively leaving the fellowship which is not formally recognised as a context in which to exercise ministry (as Methodist local preachers, for example). This leads to calls for greater flexibility in relation to transferring accreditation, recognition of formal ministries and the nature of the Groups.
 - k. And yet almost all Fellowship Groups express no desire to become separate churches or connexions; neither do they intend to cease meeting. A good number are growing numerically, some growing fast. Overall they recognise and welcome the need for greater healthy integration. They are clear however that dialogue and exploration should be reciprocal, as between equal members of the same faith family in terms of decision making and openness to change.
34. Though significant differences pertain, it is worth recalling that in Synod Cymru and its predecessors the Conference has already recognised the deep significance of language and culture, and possesses a model of District not simply configured by geographical boundaries.
35. It is also important to recognise that our current, wonderfully plural Methodist situation is far from unique. It is vital therefore that those who undertake work on our behalf draw upon the patterns and experiments used by other Methodist Churches (eg the Methodist Church in Italy, the Malaysian Methodist Church and the Uniting Church of Australia) for our learning, both in terms of positive paths to follow and potential pitfalls to avoid.
36. The issues involved here are complex, almost certainly far reaching and potentially radical. But I concur with others that they require serious attention, continuing and further conversation

marked by active listening and careful sharing, leading to apt proposals being brought to appropriate connexional bodies as soon as possible.

Releasing our buildings for mission

37. My reports to the Conference in 2011 and 2012 included material about *God's properties and our stewardship: resources of discipleship and mission*. I echoed back to the Conference repeated comments I had heard from lay officers and ministers throughout the Connexion about the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by our c4800 church properties. There was – and remains still – a generally held view that we have too many church properties, not all in the best location or condition to enable us to engage as effectively in God's mission as we desire. Alongside this is the reality that 'ownership' – both in terms of spiritual belonging and trusteeship in a Local Church – creates a challenging context in which to find sensitive and sensible ways of addressing issues relating to 'our churches', and especially their closure.
38. In this report I focus particularly on two related aspects which have been the subject of conversation and reflection at the Methodist Council and the Connexional Leaders' Forum in recent months. The first is the important business of closing churches well, of 'good endings' in terms of processes, pastoral care, and liturgical provision. The second relates to examining the current processes whereby Local Churches become 'classes', or close, and the relevant Standing Orders, with a view to revising them as necessary in order to further encourage the releasing of energy and resources for God's mission.
39. The provision of material relating to closing churches well is a relatively straightforward matter. Following consultation, I am suggesting that on-line resources be gathered and created in an easily accessible form on the Methodist Church website. These would likely include theological, missional, pastoral and liturgical material. Resources enabling a Local Church or Circuit to undertake a 'review' of its life in relation to its buildings and the mission of God would be available. In recent years District Development Enablers in particular have created and developed hugely helpful high quality materials relating to circuit and church reviews, and expert facilitation continues to be available through the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network and elsewhere. Some contextual material could be included, such as the longer reports presented to the Council on this matter, or appropriate excerpts from Conference reports and Statistics for Mission, for example. The Faith and Order Liturgical Subcommittee has produced liturgical and worship material relating to closing churches, and this would be included. Crucially the resource would be a collecting and gathering place for stories and learning from around the Connexion where church buildings have been closed – or through the processes of review or mission audit have experienced new life. However all the material would assume that church buildings do close for a variety of right reasons and that this can be done well.
40. There are several contexts in which Local Churches close. Often a survey or report will make clear a building has come to an end of its useful life, leading to 'enforced' closure, or merger with others, sometimes but not always including a new build. Very often a small faithful congregation decides, with a mixture of sorrow, reluctance and relief to close its premises. Others seek to become a 'class' in the local Circuit while retaining none, part or all of their property. Then there are some instances when there is great reluctance or even flat refusal to close a Local Church by the local congregation (and/or community) when most others, for example in the Circuit, believe closure is the right or only thing to happen.

41. In light of these contexts and many more there is clear need for the following work being undertaken:
42. Revisiting SO 605 and SO 612 which essentially set out the circumstances in which a local Methodist church ceases to be regarded as such, or seeks to become a 'class'.
 - a. At present, a Local Church having six or fewer members for at least four successive quarters can then be recognised to cease to be a Local Church, and SO 612 indicates a period of around three years is required for a Local Church to become a 'class'. Is the number of members too low? Are the periods of time involved too long? What are the implications of increasing the minimum number of members that can trigger such processes (recognising that many parts of the Connexion have very many very small Local Churches)? And because we can all think of very small congregations which are potent witnesses to the gospel, and/or occupying premises that are critically important to a local community; and equally think of quite large churches that appear devoid of fruitfulness over lengthy periods, is a minimum number of members too blunt an instrument? And if it is, what is a sharper instrument, or what a better 'toolbox'?
 - b. A significant issue to consider is what size of membership is generally required to enable the appointing of officers to be made required by our Standing Orders. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that this is a problem for increasing numbers of Methodist churches, some much bigger than six members, and a common factor in Local Churches becoming 'classes'.
 - c. Another significant issue is the ability or inability of a Local Church to pay the circuit assessment. Standing Order 650 (4) is clear that paying the Methodist Church Fund assessment is the first charge on a church's general fund. However we all know Local Churches, large and small, that are healthy and strategically located in terms of mission and service potential, but unable to pay their assessment. We know too of Local Churches, large and small, seemingly devoid of much vitality or purpose in relation to their context but which have sufficient financial resources for the payment of the assessment not to be a problem. It is for such reasons as these and others that the issue of assessments is often addressed by Circuits themselves who, consequent upon SO 500 follow SO 515 (3) and allocate the assessment based on ability to pay rather than (simply) membership figures. This sometimes results in mission potent Local Churches currently without sufficient resources being enabled to survive or even flourish: a proper expression of connexionalism, but also sometimes results in Local Churches without much evidence of vitality or contextual purpose paying little assessment over many years.
 - d. It has already been noted that issues of vitality and fruitfulness are not predetermined by size. For all Local Churches, small and larger, both those that can pay their assessment and those which cannot, how rigorously and regularly should an assessment of their witness, fruitfulness and participation in the mission of God take place, undertaken by Methodist people belonging to both the Local Church and the Circuit? If vitality and mission are the key criteria, we need to be open to closing bigger churches and encouraging their congregations to support and enhance the mission of smaller congregations in the Circuit if our prayerful assessment leads to such conclusions.
 - e. Ascertaining and reflecting upon the reasons why Local Churches become 'classes' may also be beneficial. Is becoming a 'class' designed mainly as a mechanism for postponing closure, or has it got a greater strategic and missional purpose than that? If so, how is the

missional priority made clearer? (Some of those consulted, while recognising the heritage of the term 'class' felt it was not an appropriate term in this context, noting that other Methodist groupings throughout the world refer to 'mission stations' or 'mission spaces'.)

- f. How does all this relate to Local Ecumenical Partnerships of various kinds?
43. Work on these and other related issues should be undertaken and guidelines and recommendations presented to appropriate bodies.
 44. Then there is the significant issue of managing trusteeship. Since 1976 the Church Council has been the local managing trustee body with responsibility for the whole life of the local Methodist church: the spiritual and worship life, its mission and witness, as well as overall property and financial oversight. This comprehensive view of the life of the Local Church is outlined in SOs 600, 601, 602 and 603 and is the basis on which good and effective trusteeship is measured. All this lies alongside SO 500 which outlines the nature and purposes of the Circuit, stating it is "the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help."
 - a. Consultations suggest that the time has come to explore whether or not there is benefit and what is involved in order to identify and implement an effective mechanism for removing managing trusteeship from local Church Councils in certain circumstances, but without also allowing abdication of trustee responsibilities, and relocating trustee responsibility in the Circuit Meeting. This would be a significant development in our practice, but may potentially provide a way of engaging the increasing fragility of governance in many Local Churches, while at the same time offering a context for decision-making in relation to property and mission.
 - b. The role of the District in the closure and good endings of our church properties should also be assessed and reviewed as a part of this work. It is clear that several Districts already have groups of various titles offering support to Circuits and Local Churches, but at present the District has no formal or authoritative role and responds to invitations to provide input. Yet SO 962 gives responsibility to the district Policy Committee to formulate and keep a "development master-plan for the Methodist Church buildings."
 - c. Some contents of the *Statistics for Mission* report which appears elsewhere in the *Agenda* offer crucial insights into our Connexion when considering how to best release and use church properties for God's mission today. That over half the total number of our Local Churches are very small, while noting that the larger the church the greater the likelihood of numerical growth is important information. As is that now only 13% of Local Churches are located in city centres, inner city areas and council estates; or that the reduction in church buildings over the past decade is proportionately much smaller than the reduction in membership numbers and church attendance figures. Overall this report provides a clear and broad context which compels careful but urgent response and action.
 - d. Any review of this collection of issues would also have to give account to the constraints and protections of charity law in respect of disposing of buildings, and those of the Model Trust.

45. It is vital to recall constantly that amid the various complex issues outlined here, the essential focus is on releasing resources for mission (rather than 'merely' closing church buildings). How we choose to use our still considerable resources, strategically and sacrificially is the real debate.
46. Notwithstanding the complexity of this work, I invite the Conference to direct that some work is now undertaken with a view to bringing recommendations in due course.

Realising the main thing

47. However the *Statistics for Mission* report is understood and interpreted it does not make for easy or comfortable reading. If ever we needed any encouragement to continue to focus on those things that make for an ever better Church which is a discipleship movement shaped for mission today, then these statistics provide that.
48. In the context of stark statistics about our Connexion, and amid the multiple deep challenges of which we are deeply aware, I note here how often, when the Connexional Secretary and I have visited Local Churches and Circuits, there is evident a growing desire to reclaim evangelism as a crucial part of God's mission, as the main thing. As one circuit steward put it recently "if we are not responding to the Great Commission then what are we doing?" Others have pointed out the stark truth that without attending to falling numbers, prioritising growing disciples and church communities, in every neighbourhood, as an increasing matter of urgency, we will now quickly find ourselves in a place where even core gospel witness and service is increasingly beyond us.
49. Other repeated realisations are worth including here.
 - a. There is increasing evidence of churches and Circuits realising that some of what they are about is, as one steward put it "displacement activities", used in order to avoid getting involved in finding ways of introducing people to Jesus Christ, and then engaging positively with that realisation.
 - b. More Local Churches are realising that they cannot 'do everything' and are responding to this realisation. This is not always about simply giving up on things they believe matter, but is about looking for new partnership models to make sure things happen without taking on the whole cost, work and responsibility on their own.
 - c. Nor is it the case that affirmations about the centrality of evangelism are coming from the usual or expected voices. There is an increasing realisation that the task of telling of God's love for us and God's call upon our lives is not the role, privilege and responsibility of particular Methodists – it belongs to all of us.
 - d. There is increasing awareness that however understandable it is, the main thing is not (merely) the survival of an institution, even a wonderful institution like our beloved Church. Rather we are realising afresh that the best thing that anyone can do, whoever they are, wherever they live, at whatever time and in whatever circumstances is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. And consequently seeking and finding apt, relevant, sensitive and effective ways of presenting Jesus Christ to the world in which we live with so many and so different others, is the critical task of the Church today.

50. Even with that desire to present the gospel as outlined above the question of the sustainability of our Church as a denomination which engages in the multifarious ways it seeks to do, whilst its membership and giving declines, cannot nor should be ignored. If we are seriously to tackle the issue of our future way of being we cannot continue to do all those things we have historically done. Thinking and action need to be taken to plot our path in response to God's call. How are we responding to our statistics for mission as we plan for the next few years?
51. Through visits to local church meetings and Circuit Meetings (which all members of the Senior Leadership Group of the Connexional Team have made this past year) we have experienced a huge variety of gifts and moving levels of loyalty and commitment. We have seen and heard of hard work and dedication, often in adverse circumstances; of partnerships, perseverance, celebration and care. We have experienced repeated affirmations – both explicit and implicit – that our connexionalism is both gift and challenge: is 'us' and 'we' and not 'they' and 'them'. It has been seminal for us to be connected in this way, and such experiences continue to shape our work and fire our spirits, and we extend our grateful thanks to all who have shared their lives and stories with us.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 31/1. The Conference received the Report.**
- 31/2. A. The Conference directed the General Secretary to ensure that an appropriate working group is appointed to consider the issues raised in paragraphs 25 to 36 of the report.**
- B. The Conference directed the working group to make an interim report to the Methodist Council, and a final report with any proposals to the Conference as soon as possible.**
- 31/3. The Conference directed that the material referred to in paragraph 39 of the report is gathered and, as necessary, created, and made available on the Methodist Church website.**
- 31/4. The Conference directed the General Secretary to ensure that an appropriate group is formed with the task of addressing the various issues and questions outlined in paragraphs 41 to 46 of the report, with a view to bringing guidelines and resolutions to the Methodist Council and the Conference as soon as possible.**
- 31/5. The Conference directed the Connexional Leaders' Forum to consider paragraphs 47 to 51 of the report and directed the General Secretary to gather a small group of appropriately gifted and experienced people to consider how to implement the changes encouraged by the Connexional Leaders' Forum, to realise the main thing and to report to the Conference in 2015.**