

60. Memorials to the Conference

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Notes for the guidance of members of the Conference

1. Introduction to memorials

Memorials are messages from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They suggest that the Conference takes action or makes a statement on an issue. The memorials received since the last Conference are listed in this report. These memorials may help members of the Conference to judge the main concerns currently felt in the Connexion, and the strength of opinion they represent.

Each year the Methodist Council is required to appoint a Memorials Committee made up of representatives from Districts to aid the Conference in replying to each memorial. The replies to these memorials have been drafted by members of the Connexional Team and officers of other relevant bodies. They have been scrutinised by the Memorials Committee and amended where the committee felt it was appropriate.

The committee recommends to the Conference the replies printed in the Agenda under each memorial. The Conference binds itself either to agree each reply, to amend it, or to agree an alternative reply (see Standing Order 133(4), printed in the Rules of Procedure on page 12 of the Agenda).

In some of its responses, the committee makes no comment on the substance of a memorial, but indicates that the reply of the Conference is given in other resolutions of the Conference. This kind of response does not mean that the committee has not taken seriously the points made in the memorial. It means that another report deals with the issue more fully. Debate on that report gives the Conference an opportunity to discuss the issues raised by the memorial.

2. Consideration of the memorials by the Conference

Any member of the Conference has the right to move an amendment to the reply recommended by the committee, or to propose that it is substituted by a different reply. Amendments to replies should be submitted in the form of a notice of motion, the deadlines for which can be found in the First Report of the Conference Business Committee on page 24 of the Agenda. However, members are urged to give notice of their intention to move an amendment as early as possible and not to wait until the deadline.

If the Conference rejects a reply, an acceptable alternative must, then or later, be put to and agreed by the Conference. In addition, any two members of the Conference may, by notice of motion submitted on the first day of the relevant session, propose that, instead of dealing with the committee's recommended replies in the ordinary course of business, the Conference shall debate a resolution based on one or more of the memorials.

This year, the Memorials Committee has recommended to the Conference Business Committee that the replies to any memorials which relate to other items of business in the Agenda be taken at the same time as that business, and that the remaining replies should be placed in the *en bloc* business of the Conference, unless the Business Committee feels that they should be debated. Any recommended reply to a memorial which is the subject of an amending notice of motion will automatically be removed from *en bloc* business (see Standing Order 134A(1)(c), Agenda page 13).

Members of the Conference with questions on any matter affecting memorials and the procedures described above should consult the Memorials Secretary, Martin Harker. For example, if any member

wishes to change the recommended reply of the committee, the Memorials Secretary would be happy to advise on how and when to propose either an amendment or the substitution of a different reply.

The Memorials Secretary will notify each Synod and Circuit of the reply the Conference has made to its memorial.

M1 Fresh Expressions and Methodist ecclesial formation

In light of Fresh Expressions, the Peterborough (23/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: 25 for, 0 against) calls upon the Conference to review its Standing Orders relating to ecclesial formation: namely Standing Order 605 (new churches may only be formed when 12 Methodist members unite), Standing Order 612 (the minimum membership of established churches is six), and Standing Order 051 (an exception to the 'one member, one society' principle).

Whilst we wish to affirm the broad recommendations made within *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, we urge the Conference to consider the critique offered by the Church Army Research Unit in 2013 (*Report on Strand 3b*). This suggests that our understanding of 'church' is underpinned by a practice rather than a relational approach, which is unhelpful and even unrealistic for Fresh Expressions. Whilst we recognise that Fresh Expressions originate from a joint Anglican-Methodist perspective, we find considerable merit in the Church Army's argument. For a Methodist Fresh Expression to constitute itself properly as a new church, those who are already members of a local Methodist Church (and who may well serve a vital role in both), are forced to leave one for the other. Moreover, whilst the Church is encouraging Fresh Expressions to configure themselves in ways that are appropriate to local context, it seems incongruous that they should be expected to adhere to the 12-member rule, especially when established churches retain their legal status until they have fewer than six.

The Statistics Office has reported to us that out of over 2,700 Fresh Expressions, only one has constituted itself as a church, and that in the main, new churches are formed through the amalgamation of declining churches, or through local ecumenical partnerships. We therefore request that the Conference reduces the qualifier under SO 605 to six, and to extend the provisions of SO 051 to allow dual Methodist membership in local contexts.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Peterborough Circuit Meeting for highlighting some of the questions about the ecclesial identity of Fresh Expressions as they relate to Methodist theology and polity. It notes that since the 2012 report *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* the Methodist Church has continued to develop its practice and theological thinking in respect of Fresh Expressions, not least as new kinds of Fresh Expressions come into being and existing ones develop. Several Fresh Expressions have constituted themselves as Local Churches. As the Methodist Council reported in 2015 "a small but significant number of Fresh Expressions have become a church of the circuit in which they reside".¹

There are two pieces of current work of particular relevance:

- (a) The Connexional Team is undertaking a piece of research into Fresh Expressions, with the assistance of those who produced the 2013 Church Army report and paralleling, where possible, the Church of England questions so that the insights are comparable. This is due to be followed by a stage two research project which will look at new ecclesial communities that are not within the designation of Fresh Expressions and explore what the Church might learn from these developments.

¹ *Methodist Council Report Part 2, 2015, paragraph 3.2.*

- (b) The Methodist Council has directed the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee to ensure that work is undertaken with regards to the oversight and governance of Fresh Expressions. This includes consideration of appropriate and effective oversight structures and processes, as well as looking at how the Methodist Church might foster supportive relationships and encourage wider ownership of the mission of Fresh Expressions.

Those engaged in these pieces of work are considering various reports and research findings as there is much to learn from the variety of different perspectives on these issues. Many of these do not engage directly with Methodist ecclesiology, including the Church Army Research Unit's 2013 report which presupposes a different ecclesiology. Methodism's understanding of church is intrinsically relational, underpinned by the connexional principle which "enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the Church" and "witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God".² The Methodist sense of 'belonging' "at its best, derives from a consciousness that all Christians are related at all levels of the Church to each other"³ and this is expressed through the communal and collegial nature of the Methodist Church's structures of fellowship, consultation, government and oversight. Relatedness is therefore a distinctive emphasis of Methodist ecclesiology. The connexional principle together with the emphasis on fellowship and shared discipline exercised through small groups, and the conviction that the Church should be structured for mission and be able to respond pragmatically to new opportunities, provides the framework for addressing the questions of ecclesial identity in relation to Fresh Expressions within a Methodist context.⁴ The Methodist Church encourages Fresh Expressions to develop both in response to their local context and in relationship with other Methodists, not least within the relevant Circuit.

All Methodist members have been received into membership of the Methodist Church and their membership of such is held within a Local Church. Some other churches, particularly those with a congregational ecclesiology, have a different understanding of membership that is an articulation of belonging to a specific local community of Christians. Methodist membership is understood to be of the whole Church,⁵ and brings an immediate sense of belonging to the wider Church that itself "claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ".⁶ As membership is of the Methodist Church as well as of a Local Church, it cannot be multiple. Dual membership, as provided for in Clause 8 of the Deed of Union and enabled by SO 051, refers to the situation where a Methodist is a member of both the Methodist Church in Britain and another Methodist Church.

Membership of the Methodist Church brings various privileges and duties, and Methodist members are eligible to serve on the oversight and governance bodies at all levels in the life of the Methodist Church and not just within the Local Church. Although membership of the Methodist Church will be held in one place, members are free to participate in the life of other Local Churches. There are many ways in which a sense of belonging to more than one Local Church might be expressed including, in some circumstances, through holding office. Standing Orders already make provision for appointing a member of another Local Church to a Church Council in order to ensure that all areas of the church's life are adequately represented (SO 610(2A)(b)), or to temporarily make up the minimum number required to properly constitute the Church Council (SO 612).⁷ Whilst these provisions might be helpful for some Fresh Expressions, the Conference notes that the Church Army's Research Unit identified one of the parameters for a Fresh Expression and indicator of its 'health' is whether at least "the majority of members (who are part of the public gathering) see it as their major expression of being church".⁸

² *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, paragraph 4.6.1

³ *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, paragraph 4.6.4

⁴ *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, section 4.7, especially paragraph 4.7.1.

⁵ *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, paragraph 4.4.7.

⁶ *Deed of Union*, clause 4

⁷ There is also the provision under Standing Order 635(1) for someone who is a member of another local Methodist church to be the treasurer.

⁸ Church Army Research Unit, *Report on Strand 3b*, 2013, pages 10-11.

Implicit in the work being undertaken by the Law and Polity and Faith and Order Committees is the acknowledgement that as Methodist theology and polity with regard to Fresh Expressions develops, consideration will need to be given as to how it is embedded in Standing Orders. Questions about membership are only one element of this, although the Conference notes that there has been some suggestion in recent years that the minimum numbers set out in Standing Orders 605 and 612 are too low. Significant issues to consider are the size of membership required to appoint the officers required, the ability to pay the circuit assessment, and the increasingly complex government and management responsibilities of managing trustees alongside their responsibilities in overseeing the worship and spiritual life, mission and witness of the Local Church.⁹ Indeed, there are indications that some Local Churches have become classes in order to further their witness and mission¹⁰ and the potential of this form of ecclesial expression for some Fresh Expressions warrants further consideration.

The broader issues raised by this memorial are already being considered as part of the work being undertaken by the Law and Polity and Faith and Order Committees as directed by the Methodist Council. The Conference therefore declines the specific requests of this memorial but directs the Methodist Council to report on the progress of this work to the Conference in 2018.

M2 Ministers in local appointment

The Bolton and Rochdale District Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 36; Voting: 35 for, 1 against) asks the Conference, in accordance with the recommendations of the 1999 report *Flexible Patterns of Ministry*, to:

- (a) reopen recruitment for presbyters who before 1999 would have been called ministers in local appointment;
- (b) instruct the Connexional Team to present proposals for doing so to the Methodist Council in the winter or spring of 2018 for implementation in the connexional year 2018/19.

Reply

In the light of ongoing reflection on ministry in the Methodist Church, the Conference is grateful to the Bolton and Rochdale District Synod for drawing attention to the particular issues raised in this memorial. The Conference notes that although the recommendations in the *Flexible Patterns of Ministry* report to the 1999 Conference were not adopted, the report was commended to Circuits and Districts for study and response and some further work was undertaken. As a consequence, in 2002 the Conference adopted the *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* report which proposed that there be one category of presbyteral ministry which contains all presbyters in Full Connexion and that a single, transparent discipline of stationing be developed. It was envisaged that, within the stationing process, some Circuits would offer appointments that might be full-time or part-time, stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and that presbyters would similarly state what type of arrangement they were seeking. In practice, the appointments offered by Circuits and sought by presbyters within the stationing processes are primarily full-time and stipendiary.

The Ministerial Candidates' Selection Committee (MCSC) recognises that some Methodists believe that they are called to presbyteral ministry at a time when there are particular reasons for them not to move away from the area in which they are living. Those reasons might be personal circumstance, family need, or an identified missional need. The Ministries Committee recently agreed that for some candidates the needs of and their involvement in a particular ethnic or language group might fall into the same category.

An assessment of the availability for stationing of all candidates is completed and submitted by their Superintendent (on form C1(a)), including, for example, whether they are initially seeking a full- or part-time, stipendiary or non-stipendiary post. Where their deployability is severely limited, the candidate's own or a neighbouring Circuit can offer an outline profile (on form C1(b)) for an appointment to which the

⁹ *General Secretary's Report*, 2014, paragraph 42.

¹⁰ *General Secretary's Report*, 2014, paragraph 42e.

candidate might (if recommended and judged ready for stationing) be stationed as a probationer. These outlines are provisional and bind neither the candidate nor the Church; it is made clear to candidates that if they indicate that their deployment is limited then there is no guarantee that they will be matched to an appointment on the completion of initial training.

All ministers and probationers are entitled to receive a stipend, though not all choose to take it. Form C1(b) might include an agreement that the prospective probationer will not take, and the Circuit need not offer, a stipend. Similarly, there are some instances in which a C1(b) proposal would not include the provision of a manse.

The arrangements for candidates with limited deployability are understood to apply to the first appointment only. All ministers in Full Connexion are under the discipline of the Conference in matters of stationing.

Recognising the provisions that already exist, and the work on ministry in the Methodist Church that is currently being undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee, the Conference declines the memorial. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that current practice does not fully reflect the flexible patterns of ministry envisaged in the *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* report and directs the Faith and Order Committee to consider these issues as part of its work on ministry and report to the 2018 Conference.

M3 Self-supporting ministry

The Cumbria District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 95; Voting: 81 for, 1 against) is deeply concerned by the challenges that the shortage of stipendiary ministers and pressures that church finances are placing upon the Church. The Synod believes that there is an urgent need to address the shortage of ministers, acknowledging that a number of people receive, and wish to respond to, a call to ordained ministry that is neither stipendiary or itinerant. The Synod therefore asks the Conference, in line with the recommendations of the 1999 report *Flexible Patterns of Ministry*, to:

- (a) instruct the Connexional Team to bring to the April 2018 Methodist Council proposals for the inclusion of self-supporting ministry (those who would have been called Ministers in Local Appointment) in the Church's vocational and stationing literature, and subsequently bring those proposals to the 2018 Conference;
- (b) instruct the Faith and Order Committee, within their report on Ministry to the 2018 Conference, to report on the nature of self-supporting ordained ministries within the Methodist Church, and offer clear guidance on the implementation of such ministries.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M2.

M4 Candidating for ministers seeking to move from Presbyter to Deacon or vice versa

The Cardiff (2/9) Circuit Meeting (Present: 45; Voting: 40 for, 1 against) gives thanks for the various callings upon the lives of the people called Methodists, given by God and tested by the Church. We recognise that within the lay community it is common for people to be called to roles for a period of time and to then sense a call to a new ministry. As a Circuit, we recognise that occasionally those called and ordained as presbyters and deacons may also sense a call from God to explore another form of ministry. It is in this context that we express concerns over the various processes currently in place to discern if a deacon is called to be a presbyter, or a presbyter is called to be a deacon.

The process whereby someone offers to change order of ministry is set out in Standing Order 718. The Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (MCPOC) has responsibility for determining what of the material asked of other candidates shall be required in this process. At present, the process

gives no recognition that the candidate has previously undertaken a similar, if not identical process, when they originally candidated.

The Circuit Meeting believes that the current process lacks an acknowledgement of the skills and graces already seen in such a candidate and that the process can devalue the worth of a candidate who is testing a call from God to change from one form of ordained ministry to another.

The Circuit Meeting requests that the Conference directs the Connexional Team member responsible for Oversight of Ordained Ministries to review with MCPOC the current interpretation of SO 718 and to make recommendations for a new process that recognises the assessment made at the time of their original call and which seeks to test clearly the reasons for the change of call being expressed by the candidate together with any further requirements needed in relation to the new role.

The Circuit Meeting recognises that the work currently undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee on 'Ministry in the Methodist Church' will explore the relationship between the two orders, and asks that consideration be given by the working party to how a minister might appropriately explore a call to move between orders and whether SO 718 needs to be revised.

The Circuit Meeting recognises the sensitivity of this issue in particular in relation to the Diaconal Order when a member of the Order seeks to become a presbyter and asks that the Warden of the Order be fully involved in the reviews requested in this memorial.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Cardiff Circuit Meeting for its memorial which raises an important question.

The Methodist Church's understanding of diaconal and presbyteral ministry is that they are two distinct (though equal) orders in which ministers serve the Church in different ways. It has also affirmed that presbyteral or diaconal ministry is not simply about the functions which presbyters or deacons undertake as part of God's mission but about the identity of the minister and the way in which they inhabit their calling in and on behalf of the Church. Therefore, the parallel with the way in which a lay person might serve in one role for a period of time and then take up another is not exact. For that reason, it has been expected that the process of changing orders necessarily involves a process of discernment equivalent though not identical to that undertaken by a lay person offering for ordained ministry.

The memorial indicates that the current understanding of the need to candidate as if from the beginning has been interpreted by some as denying the significance of the earlier discernment processes that the minister undertook and the years of formation and ministerial experience that she or he has had. That is regrettable and was never the intention of those who devised the current processes. Inevitably, the Church continues to learn about and from its ministers whose vocations develop in unexpected ways and has a duty to enable a process of testing that honours both who the minister is and the theology of ministry that it proclaims. The Conference therefore accepts the memorial and directs the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee to consult with the Faith and Order Committee and to bring a fuller response to the 2019 Conference.

M5 The Wales Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 70; Voting: unanimous)

This memorial was received with the same text as M4. The Conference adopts the same reply.

M6 Serving another denomination

The Scotland District Synod, Presbyteral Session (Present: 36; Voting: 21 for, 9 against), is grateful for the ecumenical partnerships and working that are now available to us in Scotland and that our Standing Orders allow membership of more than one denomination. We express our sadness however that the procedures

for presbyters wishing to serve another denomination (where there would be no requirement for re-ordination) are not being followed by all of our partner denominations and ask that the Ministries Committee collaborate with the appropriate partner denominations to improve the way in which these matters are conducted for a better serving of the present age with a view to reporting to the Conference of 2019.

Reply

The Conference, like the Presbyteral Session of the Scotland District Synod, is grateful for the ecumenical partnerships in Scotland. It is also grateful that people can be members of the Methodist Church as well as of other Christian communions (Deed of Union, 8(e)(i)).

The Methodist Church has benefitted from the ministry of presbyters and deacons of other conferences and churches in various ways, usually by those individuals being recognised and regarded, authorised to serve, or associate ministers. Some other conferences and churches have their equivalent procedures but there are factors (for example, the way that oversight is exercised or the legal requirements of the nation in which the other church is located) that make reciprocity difficult in some instances. Our procedures for permitting ministers to serve another conference or church are set out in Standing Order 735. It is for each conference or church, including the Methodist Church, to follow its own procedures in these matters and it is desirable that conferences and churches understand each other's procedures and the reasons for them; in this way fruitful ecumenical sharing and learning can take place.

Standing Order 736(1) says, "The Conference shall seek to enter into mutually acceptable arrangements with other conferences and churches as to the well-being and terms of service of and their respective responsibilities for ministers of one conference or church serving for the time being under another." Whilst declining the specific request made in the memorial (as the Conference considers that this relates to the procedures of other denominations), the Conference does recognise that all such arrangements need to be kept under review and directs the Ministries Committee to consider the general issues raised by this memorial and to report to the Conference in 2019.

M7 Access to local preaching and worship leading training materials

The East Anglia District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 106; Voting: 99 for, 1 against) notes that the East Anglia District includes Circuits where broadband speeds are very low. As a result, such Circuits are finding that the recruitment of new local preachers and leaders of worship is being made more difficult by the fact that access to the new training materials can only be gained online. This raises issues of equality of accessibility to learning.

The District therefore requests that the Conference directs the Ministries Committee to review the ways in which the materials can be made more accessible for those without reliable broadband, portable devices or who cannot easily work on a screen.

Reply

The Conference thanks the East Anglia District Synod for its memorial. The development of *Worship: Leading and Preaching* as an online course has had a number of benefits in enabling flexible learning and appealing to a number of different learning styles. At the same time, it was recognised when work began on the course that there might be difficulties for some learners with little previous experience of online learning and for others living in areas with slow broadband speeds. The Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Studies Board is addressing the former through the commissioning of a pre-study module preparing the learner for the experience of online learning. In the case of slow broadband speeds, whilst improvements may be expected in the future in the roll out of fast broadband, a number of steps have already been taken to mitigate its effects. For example, an enhancement in summer 2016 has already greatly improved the performance of the system when watching video material for those with slow

broadband speeds; the video material is also available on a USB flash drive ('memory stick') specifically for people for whom online access is difficult; audio and written transcriptions of video material are already available; and a print function is available for page and chapter printing so that sections of the material can be printed out locally as required. It should be noted that the costs of a published print version of the new course would be prohibitive and the course is currently offered free at the point of use. Indeed a print version would not contain a number of resources key to fulfilment of the learning outcomes. *Worship: Leading and Preaching* was always envisioned as a course which would continue to evolve and a mechanism already exists through the Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Studies Board for feedback to be received and reflected upon as improvements are made, including issues of use and accessibility.

The Conference, therefore, declines the memorial but directs the Local Preachers and Worship Leaders Studies Board to take account of it in the future development of the course.

M8 Sabbaticals for local preachers and worship leaders

The Romiley (19/16) Circuit Meeting (Present: 24; Voting: unanimous) requests that the Conference consider encouraging local preachers and worship leaders to take periodic sabbaticals from preaching and worship leading for the purposes of study and spiritual renewal. We envisage this being two quarters off the plan once every seven years but more frequent or for longer periods if local circumstances permit. The Circuit Meeting also requests the Conference to consider what financial resources might be made available for further study and from what source.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Romiley Circuit Meeting for its memorial. A review of sabbaticals for presbyters and deacons took place in 2016 and its findings are shared elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

In response to three memorials to the 2013 Conference (M7, M8 and M9), the Ministries Committee committed itself to reviewing the duties, responsibilities, care and continuing development of Worship Leaders and Local Preachers and will report via the Methodist Council to the Conference in 2018.

Therefore, the Conference declines the memorial but directs the Ministries Committee to consider the matters raised in this memorial as they review various aspects of the ministry of Local Preachers.

M9 Complaints procedures

The Manchester (19/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 37; Voting: 26 for, 0 against) wishes to bring to the notice of the Conference the problems that arise on those occasions when the complaints procedure takes a long time to reach resolution. The Circuit is aware of complaints processes that have taken more than a year to conclude.

The Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to recognise that when the process is lengthy this may have a considerable impact on the mental and physical health of those concerned.

The Circuit Meeting wants to draw the attention of the Conference to the good practice of many organisations in the voluntary sector which seek to conclude their complaints procedures within a specified time of the initial complaint being made.

The Circuit Meeting recognises the need for confidentiality but regrets that, in its experience, the current complaints procedure appears to allow little or no communication with those involved regarding the estimated time that the process will take. Updates on the timescale for resolving the matter would be reassuring to all parties. This could avoid individuals and churches from feeling that their lives have been put on hold indefinitely.

The Circuit invites the Conference to review its complaints policy and procedures, with the aim of:

- (a) speeding up the process by which complaints are investigated and judgement reached, by seeking to match best practice in the voluntary sector;
- (b) while respecting the need for confidentiality, providing information to all concerned (individuals, churches and Circuits) about the estimated time and, where possible, offering regular updates.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Manchester Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The Conference recognises the significant impact that making or responding to a complaint can have on the individuals concerned and is thankful to the members of the connexional Complaints Panel who volunteer their time to consider complaints.

Standing Order 1124(17) provides that a complaints team must complete its full consideration of a complaint within two months of the date on which the lead member receives the documents (or as soon as possible thereafter). The Conference recognises that, due to the members of the panel being volunteers, it can sometimes take time to find people available to serve on a team. The Conference also recognises the ever-increasing number of complaints being referred to the connexional Complaints Panel by local complaints officers. This year, a number of nominations for new panel members have been brought to the Conference in order to expand the pool of volunteers willing to serve on teams.

Every effort is made to expedite these matters appropriately and the complaints policy and procedure set out in Part 11 of Standing Orders includes limits to the time that various stages of the procedure may take. Delays that do sometimes occur are not always the result of the complaints process, but often result from safeguarding or criminal investigations external to the process. If the complaint contains safeguarding concerns, Standing Order 1102(11) provides that the time limits contained in Part 11 shall, to the extent necessary, be suspended. The Conference notes the inevitable tension between full and careful investigation on the one hand and appropriate care and support of those affected by the process on the other.

The Conference recognises the significant mental and physical impact that a complaint can have on those affected, and deeply regrets those occasions when a complaints process exceeds the expected time limits. However, the breadth and diversity of complaints considered by the panel mean that setting a universal time limit is unrealistic and may undermine the focus on reconciliation. The Conference therefore believes that the time limits currently given in Part 11 are sufficient and so declines the memorial, whilst recognising that those who administer the process will do all they can to provide updates on progress in particular cases.

M10 Complaints procedures

The South East District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 154; Voting: 136 for, 0 against) asks the Conference to review the current procedures for complaints.

The Synod is grateful for the efforts of the Methodist Church to provide opportunities for healing and reconciliation through the complaints procedure. While the Synod is grateful for the efforts of the connexional complaints team to address difficult and complex issues, the actual experience of working through several complaints at the circuit and district level over the past year have prompted us to request the Methodist Council to review the complaints procedure with the following concerns included:

- The current complaints system puts an inordinate amount of work on the local complaints officer (usually the Circuit Superintendent). The decisions arrived at for many circuit-level complaints are often appealed to a higher level primarily because the complainant disagrees with the decision reached. Complaints that go to the connexional level are usually only rehashed; new information is rarely received. This devalues the Circuit's original contribution.

- The time frame for the current process can stretch over a year, which adds considerably to the stress for all concerned. The only time limit specified is that for making an appeal to a decision. Long periods can elapse before the complainant or respondent is informed of decisions. A recognisable time limit for all levels should be established including when responses can be expected, with a clearly specified procedure for obtaining permission to exceed the time limit in unusual cases.
- The published flowchart for the complaints needs additional clarity for showing how complaints are to be handled, specifically in the relationship between various options for the Connexional Complaints Panel to consider.
- The communication between the Connexional Complaints Panel and those involved with the complaint has been less than satisfactory, with information being left on answerphones or relayed in emails.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South East District Synod for its memorial. The Conference recognises the significant impact that dealing with a complaint can have on the local complaints officer. The Conference notes that Standing Order 1110(2) permits a Superintendent to “delegate his or her functions as the local complaints officer to another person who resides for the purposes of the stations or is a member in the same Circuit”.

The Conference wishes to highlight that the role of the local complaints officer is to seek to formally resolve the complaint through reconciliation and by hearing from both parties whenever possible. If the complaint cannot be formally resolved, the local complaints officer has to decide to refer the complaints to the Connexional Complaints Panel or to decline to refer the complaint, in which case, the complainant may refer the complaint within 21 days. The role of a complaints team appointed to consider a complaint that is referred is distinct from that of the local complaint officer and any decisions of a complaint team should not be seen as devaluing the efforts of the local complaints officer or the District Reconciliation Group.

Standing Order 1123(7) was amended by the Conference last year to provide a complaints team with more scope to summarily dismiss a complaint. This provision should enable complaints teams to limit those complaints that do not appear to warrant further formal investigation and may on occasion be a misuse of the complaints and discipline process.

The reply to memorial M9 has clarified that there are time limits contained within Standing Orders and the Conference refers the Synod to the reply to that memorial.

The Conference recognises that there are occasions when a phone call or email immediately following the receipt of a complaints team’s report is helpful to a complainant, respondent or the local complaint officer. However, this phone call or email will always be followed by a copy of the report of the complaints team who gave the complaint full consideration under Standing Order 1124. The local complaints officer will be provided with a copy of the report if the complaints team has made a ruling, issued advice or given directions.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Connexional Team produces more comprehensive guidance for local complaints officers in order to support them in their role and thereby to consider the resources given to the complaints process as a whole and the training available for local complaints officers, but declines the request for a full review. The Conference expresses its gratitude to all those who administer the process at circuit and connexional level and assures them and all who are party to complaints of the prayerful concern of the Methodist people.

M11 The number of Districts

The Chester and Delamere Forest (11/1) Circuit Meeting (Present: 41; Voting 38 for, 2 against) expresses its urgent concern at the escalating and increasingly intolerable cost burden of the Districts on a declining Church membership base, and requests that the Conference set up an immediate review, with the specific

objective of halving the number of Districts, to report to the Conference of 2018 for implementation in 2019.

In bringing this memorial, the Circuit makes the following observations.

The district assessment on the Circuit for the 5-year period 2013/14 to 2017/18 will have increased by 17.4% compared with the stipend increase of 8.3%, taking the District's budget increase and the stipend increase being recommended to the Conference for 2017/18. Many churches in the Circuit have reached the point at which such excessive increases are no longer sustainable.

Without rehearsing detailed annual statistics, it is self-evident that the number of Districts, with their associated costs, has not significantly decreased over many decades whilst the Church membership has fallen steadily, thereby imposing an increasing burden on every church. The inclusion of Shetland in the Scotland District in September 2016 reduced the number of Districts to 30: in 1977 there were 32 Districts. In the same period, Church membership declined from 530,000 to 200,000, in round numbers. The merging of Districts is long overdue and, such is the adverse impact of the district assessment on local church finances, it is disappointing that the issue has not as yet been tackled.

The Circuit is aware that a portion of the assessment paid to the District is contributed to the Connexion, and whilst supporting the pruning of connexional costs, also recognises that there are fixed elements of those costs which cannot easily be reduced. The key to infrastructural cost reduction thus lies primarily in a drastic reduction of the number of Districts.

The Circuit anticipates that some Districts will resist this memorial, but urges that the time has come for a realistic assessment of what the Church can afford: we cannot retain the luxury of what are significantly the same district boundaries in England and the islands (noting the merging of Scotland with Shetland and the creation of the two Synods in Wales) for reasons of old identities, historic allegiances, ecumenical overlap or even self-determination. Indeed, members of this Circuit meeting with some connexional knowledge and experience believe that the redrawing of the district boundaries could be accomplished in a few hours – this review need not take long, and tinkering around the edges will not do.

This Circuit Meeting is confident that the objective and the timescale set out above are both essential and eminently achievable.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Chester and Delamere Forest Circuit for bringing this matter to its attention.

The Conference acknowledges the very real concerns addressed in this memorial, particularly in the areas of financial resources required to support district structures.

However, the Conference judges that this issue has recently been considered in some depth through the *Larger than Circuit* process, initiated by the 2013 Conference and culminating in the report to the 2016 Conference. The *Larger than Circuit* working group consulted widely and conducted significant research into the structures beyond the Circuit. The group concluded, and the Conference concurred, that there was a lack of widespread desire for radical structural change, noting instead the need for change in the way in which leadership is exercised within Districts.

The Conference respectfully points out that the Shetland District has not been merged with the Scotland District. The change made last year was that one person is now appointed as Chair of both districts. Consequently, there are currently 31 Districts.

Elsewhere in the Conference Agenda, the Methodist Council brought proposals to the Conference in respect of reducing the number of Districts in Yorkshire, this work having begun among the Districts

themselves. This would have the effect of reducing the total number of Districts to 30 from September 2017. In light of this, the Conference continues to encourage Districts to have conversations with neighbouring Districts so that explorations regarding better ways of being structured can be developed in ways that are appropriate to the context.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M12 Naming of Yorkshire Districts

The West Yorkshire District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 97; Voting: 48 for, 34 against) asks the Conference to adopt the name of 'Yorkshire West and North' for the District designated by the Methodist Council to be known as 'Yorkshire West' in order to recognise the importance of the geographical, political, social and cultural identity that North Yorkshire contributes to the life of the new District.

Reply

The Conference thanks the West Yorkshire District Synod for the further consideration which it has given to the new names for the Districts in the Yorkshire region.

The proposal for the new configuration of the Districts in the Yorkshire region is set out in the report of the Methodist Council, part 1, section B (Conference Agenda pages 30-31). The Council heard that the process of consultation had included all the Circuits in each of the Districts and that a scrutiny group from the Council had read all of the submissions to ensure that the reports presented to each Synod were an accurate reflection of the feedback received. The Council also received the voting figures from each District Synod, and noted that the West Yorkshire District did not vote in favour of the new names as a package. However, the Council was provided with a minute of the Synod which indicated that a discussion had been held about the name 'Yorkshire West', that an alternative had been proposed and declined and that the Synod had voted in favour of 'Yorkshire West' (61 For, 9 Against, 13 Abstentions). The Council also heard that the Synod had voted in favour of a suggestion that the word 'North' be removed from any of the names of the newly configured Districts. It was on this basis that the Council proceeded to make its recommendations to the Conference.

It is clearly not possible, in most cases, for the name of a District fully to describe its geographical location and instead has to give an indication of the area it covers. It was felt by the Council that, in this case, 'Yorkshire West' was the best option and it therefore made this recommendation to the Conference.

The reply to this memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to the Methodist Council, part 1 report.

M13 Pension contributions from lay employees

The Stamford and Rutland (23/22) Circuit Meeting (Present: 19; Voting: 16 for, 0 against) recognises that the British Government has introduced a workplace pension scheme whereby all employees may participate in, and thereby contribute to, a pension fund for their retirement.

The workplace pension scheme introduced in 2016 states that employees pay 1% of their gross pay into the fund for the year 2016/17 rising by increments of 1% to the final level of 3% by 2018/19. However, the Methodist Church of Great Britain decided that all lay employees should pay a flat rate of 6% of their gross pay.

For lower earners, this can be a large amount of their income and therefore excludes some lay employees of the Methodist Church. These are employees who are exercising ministry and mission for the Church and are an integral and important part of the Methodist family.

The Stamford and Rutland Circuit Meeting believes this to be unfair and unjust when lay employees are thus excluded from participating in making crucial savings for their retirement and calls for the pension fund managers to address this matter with immediate effect.

We therefore propose that the Methodist Conference directs the managers of the Methodist Church pension scheme to revise their current policy and make the percentage contributions less rigid given that it is currently inflexible and exclusive.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Stamford and Rutland Circuit Meeting for its memorial and acknowledges the importance of all employees making adequate financial provision for their retirement.

A similar memorial, M17 (2016), was presented to the Conference last year, and having considered the issue the Methodist Council has brought proposals to the Conference elsewhere in the Conference Agenda proposing greater flexibility of employee contribution levels. The reply to this memorial is therefore contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to that report.

M14 Connexional grant funding – co-funding

The Peterborough (23/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: 26 for, 0 against) requests that the Conference reviews the proportion of local (or externally sourced funding) that Local Churches and Circuits must raise in order to qualify for connexional grants. At present, there is considerable inequity. A Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (formerly Mission Alongside the Poor) application requires Local Churches or Circuits to source at least a half of total project costs themselves. A chaplaincy application requires a third. However, no such condition applies in the case of Mission and Ministry, including Heritage, or Property.

The fact that MAPJ applications require the highest proportion of local funding seems incoherent. Whilst the Mission and Ministry Fund acknowledges that some Circuits are faced with “impossible or overwhelmingly difficult” situations, and face “unreasonable financial burdens”, no such acknowledgement is made in the case of MAPJ. We hold that the requirement for projects to source half of their funding locally potentially discriminates against those Local Churches and Circuits that have limited resources but still sense God’s calling to serve the poor and campaign for justice. We therefore call upon the Conference to remove the MAPJ qualifier, and to also reconsider the contribution required to qualify for chaplaincy grants.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Peterborough Circuit Meeting for drawing attention to the new Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ) programme that launched in 2016. This replaces the former Mission Alongside the Poor programme (MAPP) and represents the Methodist Church’s commitment to working within communities to alleviate poverty and achieve justice.

MAPJ grants are particularly important to the Connexional Grants Committee (CGC) as it seeks to benefit the most vulnerable. In 2015/16 grants totalling £778,000 were awarded to MAPJ projects from connexionally-held funds. The level of funding available depends largely on income to the Mission in Britain Fund, which the Conference urges churches, Circuits and individual Methodists to support via regular donations.

The requirement for 50% match funding for MAPJ grants is based on the following considerations:

- The amount of money available annually to the CGC is finite and represents only a small fraction of that available across the Connexion. The match funding requirement helps to restrict the resource that is taken up by MAPJ grants, ensuring that funds remain for mission and ministry applications that are

deemed to be of connexional significance. Similarly, chaplaincy applications are also not required to meet connexional significance criteria and therefore require a local contribution.

- As MAPJ projects are generally local, the match funding requirement is a local stake in project sustainability, this local stake ensures an ongoing commitment to work in partnership with those experiencing disadvantage.
- The match funding requirement should be seen as being compensated to some extent by the fact that the CGC is committed to giving MAPJ funding priority. MAPJ applications have a very high success rate compared to other grant streams.

The report to the 2016 Conference entitled *Mission Alongside the Poor in the 21st Century* stated: “Although the (normal) ceiling [£50,000] and match funding criteria ease pressure on the grants funds **the CGC retains the authority to offer a larger grant or require less match funding if there is a persuasive need and sufficient funds available**. This offers useful flexibility while also encouraging applicants to make their own commitment to proposed projects.” (Para 3.3, emphasis added.) This makes it clear that the CGC already has the option to offer grants for more than 50% of the cost of a project in exceptional circumstances; particularly where there is a lack of funds held by the Local Church or Circuit.

The situation for property grants is quite different. The maximum grant currently available is £200,000 in order to enable a range of projects to be supported. Since the cost of property projects varies widely from less than £100,000 to well over £1million, the application of a percentage level from connexional grants is not appropriate.

The Conference is satisfied that the existing criteria provide an appropriate balance between the desire to assist as many projects as possible from a finite budget, achieving effective local commitment, and offering a greater proportion of project funding in exceptional circumstances. It therefore declines the memorial.

M15 Connexional grant funding – balancing holiness, risk and sustainability

The Peterborough (23/21) Circuit Meeting (Present: 29; Voting: 26 for, 0 against) welcomes the transparency with which the Methodist Church lays out the eligibility criteria that projects must meet to access its various streams of grant funding. However, we note the difference between criteria and assessment, and having examined the application forms for all funding streams, call upon the Conference to commission a review of how, in its allocation of grant funding, the Church balances missional need, perceived risk, and potential reward. In our view, the requirement that *new projects* forecast the growth and scope of their ministry over five years (as would be required for stationing) may well, in some cases, be unrealistic.

Whilst we recognise the need for prayerful planning, we are concerned that the request for a “work plan” (which requires projects to present a schedule of “activities, targeted beneficiaries, beneficiary-numbers, and measurable anticipated outcomes” for each year of funding), as well as a five-year financial forecast, is impractical for new and innovative projects where the primary focus includes (separately or as one), serving the poor, community development, and/or ecclesial formation. Crucially, whilst practitioners are required to predict the participation, scope, and scale of their projects, the criteria fail to acknowledge how success in new ventures requires flexibility and an openness to opportunities as they arise. We therefore ask the Conference, within its review, to scrutinise how the grant application process balances questions of sustainability with an openness to holiness, risk, and sacrificial giving.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Peterborough Circuit Meeting for drawing attention to the use of connexionally-held funds.

The Connexional Grants Committee (CGC) is charged with seeking to balance “missional need, perceived risk, and potential reward”. Potential reward must be specified, even in outline terms, on grant application

forms. In its scrutiny of applications the CGC highlights areas which can be improved (usually by resubmission). This is especially the case for descriptions of both need and reward, these are factors which often lead to applications being declined, including at the earliest stages of the scrutiny process.

The requirement that applications forecast deliverables, beneficiaries and outcomes for up to five years is an essential part of the CGC's responsible stewardship of Methodist funds and is strongly rooted in CGC processes and draft policy statements. A five-year financial forecast is even more essential. The CGC would expect that Districts are applying a similar process, even if only for a shorter three-year grant period. The CGC is committed to meaningful monitoring and evaluation of grant-funded projects, as required both by the Charity Commission and the Methodist Church's auditors. Appropriate monitoring can only take place if activities and beneficiaries are specified.

Questions relating to risk are specifically covered on the application form and applications will have more chance of success if risk factors are addressed by applicants. The CGC is clear that this does not mean that all risk can be eradicated or mitigated, but rather that the applicant body has recognised and considered those risks in order to produce a strategy for monitoring and addressing them.

All of the above areas are essential for the CGC to meet its obligations as a custodian of connexional funds. Appropriate application of criteria informed by the principles of responsible stewardship both enables the projects with most impact to be funded and also supports the objective and transparent allocation of limited resources. This ensures that the CGC meets its responsibilities as set out in Standing Order 213B.

Responsibility for grant-making policy rests with the Methodist Council. At its meeting in April 2017 the Council appointed a small group of its members to work with the CGC on reviewing its policy for mission and ministry in Britain grants.

In light of this, the Conference therefore refers the memorial to the Council for consideration as part of its review of connexional grants policy.

M16 Use of reserves for local mission

The Northampton District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 161; Voting: 150 for, 0 against), noting the healthy state of the Connexion's financial reserves, welcomes the appointment of a Strategic Property Committee and the recent direction given by the Methodist Council to the Connexional Grants Committee to produce a full policy on the awarding of grants. Mindful of the requirements of charity law with respect to reserves, and aware of the scrutiny of connexional and other church reserves by external funders when approached by Local Churches and Circuits seeking support for mission projects, the Synod asks the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to consider the breadth of resourcing for local mission and evangelism, and how reserves may best be used to enable and strengthen local initiatives.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Northampton District Synod for highlighting the importance of effective reserves policies. This is both a matter of charity law and effective stewardship of the resources with which God has blessed the Methodist Church.

The Conference notes that over the last three years the Methodist Council has adopted reserves policies for each of the main connexional funds for which it is the managing trustee body. Via the annual budgeting round it is in the process of bringing balances down to the agreed levels by making additional amounts available to the Connexional Grants Committee.

Each trustee body across the Connexion is responsible for agreeing a reserves policy and for managing its funds within that policy. This leads to a significant body of reserves across the Connexion as a whole. For example, the Central Finance Board reported in its 2017 annual report that it held £369.8m as cash in its

Deposit Fund at its year end on 28/02/17 and that this was an increase of £12.0m on the previous year. This is largely held on behalf of Local Churches, Circuits and Districts across the Connexion, and the Conference urges each of them to consider whether the amount of reserves they are holding is too high and if so to release it for mission; either themselves or by donating it to a fund that can be used in other parts of the Connexion – one of the true benefits of being a connexional Church.

The Conference understands that the Connexional Treasurers, working with the Strategy and Resources Committee and its Finance Sub-Committee, have initiated work with the Central Finance Board and Methodist Council intended to create mechanisms whereby excess cash can be released to fund projects for mission. At the same time, the Property Development Committee has begun detailed work on a number of initiatives which it is anticipated might benefit from such mission funding.

The Conference therefore accepts the memorial and instructs the Council to provide updates as part of the annual budgeting process for connexional funds and encourages the Council to undertake further work in respect of funds held across the Connexion.

M17 Online returns for churches without property

The people of God form the universal Church, and the existence of a Methodist Church depends therefore upon the membership of that Church, and not on its premises (Standing Order 605).

In the light of this, and of the practice of emerging and existing churches which may be nomadic in nature, the South Molton and Ringsash (24/22) Circuit Meeting (Present: 39; Voting: unanimous) asks the Conference to direct that the online returns include a tab for nomadic churches that switches off references to responsibility for property (such as deeds, property checks, sum insured, rights of way), and switches on questions which are relevant, such as whether an approved rental agreement is in place, whether public liability insurance has been taken up, and where each of its activities take place.

Reply

The Conference thanks the South Molton and Ringsash Circuit Meeting for this memorial. It reminds all Church Councils that they must fulfil their managing trustee responsibilities relating to property as defined in Standing Order 941 and complete the annual returns accordingly.

It is acknowledged that the pattern of local ministry is constantly evolving as Local Churches and Circuits seek to fulfil mission in ways that are appropriate to their local context, and that the returns process needs to enable data about such changes to be captured effectively. Recognising that there are some technical restrictions on the exact way in which systems can be designed, the Conference declines the specific solution proposed in the memorial but instructs the Methodist Council to oversee a review of the online returns facility in order to ensure that it best reflects the needs of the Church.

M18 Consent for renting in emergency situations

The Harrow and Hillingdon (35/36) Circuit Meeting (Present: 47; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the current situation regarding renting consents in emergency situations. The Circuit Meeting asks the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to undertake a review of the requirements for all appropriate bodies to give consent as currently required by Standing Order 930 when seeking to enter into an assured shorthold tenancy for up to 12 months in an emergency situation. This is to prevent a Circuit from failing to gain agreement to rent a property in a short amount of time due to extenuating circumstances.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Harrow and Hillingdon Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for drawing attention to the fact that under Standing Order 930 consent is required prior to managing trustees entering into assured shorthold tenancy agreements.

The requirement for consent acts to ensure that, even in emergency situations, managing trustees act prudently and exercise effective stewardship of resources. It also reflects the need for Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) to be party to such agreements with the online consents system serving to automatically involve TMCP at the appropriate point.

It is feasible for the entire consents process to be completed swiftly. For example, charity law does not require a Qualified Surveyors Report in order to enter into a 12-month assured shorthold tenancy.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

M19 Leasing a manse to house Syrian refugees

The East Solent and Downs (26/7) Circuit Meeting (Present: 51; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the complex and lengthy process for leasing a vacant manse to the local authority for the purpose of housing Syrian refugees under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) programme.

The Circuit Meeting asks the Conference:

- (a) to agree that Circuits be allowed to lease manses to local authorities under the Syrian VPR programme at below market rent without seeking further approval from the Methodist Council;
- (b) to request TMCP to produce, as a matter of some urgency, a pack which provides step by step guidance to Circuits on leasing manses to local authorities for the purpose of housing Syrian refugees under the Syrian VPR programme. The pack to include an outline of the likely process from start to finish and also to include appropriate model leases.

Reply

The Conference thanks the East Solent and Downs Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for highlighting the continuing plight of Syrian refugees. The Conference gives thanks for individuals, Local Churches, Circuits and Districts seeking to provide hospitality and support for refugees and asylum seekers.

The Conference notes that since the Methodist Council agreed in October 2015 to the principle of letting residential properties including manses on an assured shorthold tenancy at an undervalue where such lettings will further the charitable objectives of a Circuit or Local Church, it has become clear that the rents involved are often not far below market rent.

The Conference accepts the principles of the memorial, and in doing so:

- directs the Council to amend its policy under Model Trust 20 to permit a Church Council, Circuit Meeting or District Policy Committee to grant assured shorthold tenancy agreements at below the market rent where the properties are to be occupied under the VPR programme without the need for the consent of the Council;
- directs the Council to draft guidance on this matter and to liaise with TMCP regarding the production of precedent leases.

The Conference reminds Local Churches and Circuits that queries relating to the application of Model Trust 20 policy should be directed to the Conference Office (conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk) in the first instance.

M20 Welcoming refugees

The Nottingham and Derby District Synod, Representative Session (Present 141; Voting 133 for, 4 against) wishes to express its concern about the situation regarding Syrian and other refugees.

In this context, the Synod is pleased to note that the overseas aid budget has been maintained at 0.7% of GDP. This will help to reduce the inequalities between nations that are a driving force for irregular migration. The Synod is also pleased to note that some aid is being focused on the camps in countries adjacent to Syria. Enhancing the experience of good governance in the camps will build a better Syria after the conflict.

The Synod is deeply disappointed with the progress towards accepting 20,000 people from those camps as particularly vulnerable persons. The Synod is also deeply disappointed that the 'Dubs Children' scheme for vulnerable children has been curtailed at 350 against a suggested 3,000 when the amendment was included in the Immigration Act 2016. This is perceived as an unwillingness to appreciate the contribution of migrants and refugees to our society and to honour the tradition of hospitality to asylum seekers that government ministers are all too ready to boast about.

We are aware that the issue of recognising the value of refugees, both their intrinsic worth as creations of God and the value of their contribution, is being progressed next year. JPIT have identified two injustices where campaigning work may produce positive change related to how we value refugees when they arrive in the UK:

- Asylum seekers do not have an initial right to work and this is demoralising and disempowering quite apart from the financial consequences.
- Asylum seekers do not have access to the benefits system and are instead subjected to an inferior and even more controlling Home Office Section 95 system.

The Synod requests of the Conference that pressure be placed on the Government to review its actions in relation to the treatment of displaced persons ensuring that their welfare is high on the agenda and in particular to review its decision not to accept the number of unaccompanied child refugees originally intended under the Dubs amendment.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Nottingham and Derby District Synod for its memorial and for drawing attention to the continuing plight of Syrian and other refugees.

Statistics from the Home Office show that in the first five quarters of the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme the number of Syrians resettled in the UK totalled 5,454 which is in line with the government's target; however, only 53% of local authorities had accepted any refugees under the scheme. Subsequent to the receipt of this memorial, the government also announced an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors to be taken under the Dubs amendment from 350 to 480.

The Conference accepts the principle of the memorial and, in so doing:

- requires a letter to be sent to the Home Office seeking a more compassionate response in the treatment of all displaced persons reaching the UK and, in particular, a further increase in the Government's commitment to the settlement of unaccompanied minors;
- calls on Circuits and Districts to lobby those local authorities which are not participating in the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme;
- directs the Methodist Council to encourage the Joint Public Issues Team to continue advocating for refugees and asylum seekers.

The Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 140; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the following:

- that this year marks 100 years since the Balfour declaration; 70 years since the UN partition plan for Palestine; 50 years since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights; and 10 years since Israel's blockade of Gaza
- the sadly moribund peace process in the Holy Land and current attempts to bring things to a conclusion, and the particular responsibility the British government has for this state of affairs due to its part in the first of the above historical events, its encouragement of the colonisation of Palestine during its mandate rule and its failure to uphold the part of Balfour's declaration "that nothing should be done which shall prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"
- that according to the UN, during 2016 an average of 29 Palestinian homes per week were demolished to make way for Jewish settlements.

We ask that the Conference reminds the Methodist people to be discerning in their seeking of truth in current statements of world leaders and the media, to be judicious in their use of money and to pray for a way to real peace and security through justice for all the inhabitants of the Holy Land.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod for this memorial in this year of significant anniversaries. The United Nations publishes reports of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories on a monthly basis and also provides an annual humanitarian overview (available at www.ochaopt.org). The Conference notes that in recent years the incidence of house demolitions in the occupied territories has been increasing and is dismayed that in 2016 the number of structures demolished by the Government of Israel was higher than any year since the UN began systematic recording in 2009, displacing some 1,600 Palestinians and affecting the livelihoods of over 7,000 people. In accepting this memorial, the Conference reaffirms its desire to see a lasting peace based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in Israel/Palestine, and also directs attention to its response to memorial M22.

M22 Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

The Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 110; Voting: 100 for, 0 against) notes that on 2 November 2017, it will be 100 years since the Balfour Declaration by the then British Foreign Secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour, stating that the British Government "viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish race".

Aware that at the time of the Balfour Declaration, and the British Mandate in Palestine, the British Government had no legal right to promise land that it did not own to another group of people, especially as the inhabitants of that land had not first been consulted, and noting, also, the deep historical significance of the Balfour Declaration in the context of Israel/Palestine, the Synod therefore asks the Conference:

- (a) to recognise that British Governments have failed to fulfil the second part of the Balfour Declaration, namely "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" and to now take robust peaceful actions to complete this unfinished business;
- (b) to request that the British Government make an official acknowledgement of the damaging consequences of the Balfour Declaration for the Palestinian people;
- (c) to issue a similar statement of regret, to be sent to the Palestinian Christians, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Middle East Council of Churches and the Government of Israel;
- (d) to take actions to assist the Methodist people to learn more about the situation and expectations of Palestinian Christians, including those which are outlined in their Kairos Document of 2009, and to act on what they learn so that justice and peace for both Palestinians and Israelis may be promoted.

Reply

The Methodist Conference thanks the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District Synod for its memorial.

The Methodist Conference acknowledges the long association of the Jewish people with the region of the Holy Land and the aspiration of many for return. The Conference also acknowledges the desire of Palestinian people for self-determination and calls on all parties to comprehensively respect UN Security Council resolutions and international law. The Conference remains convinced that an end to occupation, a return to the borders of 1967 and a status for Jerusalem as a place for two nations and three faiths, with parity of esteem, is the real basis upon which trust could be built up among the different communities. The desire for a lasting peace can only be based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in the area.

Helpful resources on the background to the Balfour Declaration, including an 18 minute video, are available from the Balfour Project (www.balfourproject.org). The Balfour Declaration was made at a time when the UK foreign policy was dominated by colonial interests. Contradictory assurances were made to various parties in Palestine and the British government at that time acknowledged that when setting up forms of governance in Palestine “we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country”. The values that the UK espouses today are quite different, emphasising democracy, equal rights and the rule of law, including international law. A reassessment of the values that guided our foreign policy in the past is necessary not only for the UK’s influence in helping to build a just peace in Israel/Palestine today but also to support strong community relations in our ethnically diverse British society.

The Conference therefore accepts the spirit of this memorial and of memorial M23. The Conference directs letters to be sent to the Middle East Council of Churches, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government of Israel, reaffirming the commitment of the Methodist Church to peace and justice for all the peoples of Israel/Palestine, expressing its regret at the damaging consequences of the Balfour Declaration for the Palestinian people, and calling for the centenary of the declaration to be marked as a significant historical event but not as a time of celebration.

The Conference draws the attention of the Church to the resources that can be found on the Israel-Palestine pages of www.methodist.org.uk, commends them for study and prayer, and encourages the Methodist people to continue engaging with the situation. The Conference also affirms the work of the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem (<http://methodist-liaison.org>) that is able to advise on or facilitate visits and pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

M23 Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

The Cumbria District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 95; Voting: 31 for, 12 against) notes the importance of 2017 within the current context of the Holy Land. 2 November 2017 will mark 100 years since the letter written by the then British Foreign Secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour, that contained what has now become known as the ‘Balfour Declaration’.

The letter stated:

His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

The declaration was an important step in the process that created the State of Israel. The Synod duly recognises the state of Israel as well as the consequences of its creation on the Palestinian people. The result of the United Nations resolution to partition Palestine resulted in the creation of many refugees and

it is estimated that 6 million Palestinians are currently refugees across the West Bank, Gaza and within Israel itself.

This Synod recognises that matters of justice have not been straightforward within the Holy Land and that promises made within the 'Balfour Declaration' and earlier correspondence, namely ensuring protection for the people of Palestine, have not been kept.

Given the importance of the 'Balfour Declaration' within this process and the direct involvement of the British Government, the Synod asks the Conference:

- (a) to acknowledge that prior British governments have fallen short in their obligations to ensure that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" and ask the current British government to actively seek the fulfilment of this promise;
- (b) to request, acknowledging the complexity of justice within the Holy Land, that the British Government make an official acknowledgement of the consequences of the 'Balfour Declaration' for the Palestinian people;
- (c) to seek the production, through JPIT, of material that will help the Methodist people engage with the significance of this milestone and gain a deeper understanding of matters of justice and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

Reply

The Methodist Conference thanks the Cumbria District Synod for its memorial. The matters raised in this memorial are among those raised in memorial M22 from the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District, and the Conference therefore refers the Synod to that reply.

M24 Racial diversity in the leadership of the Methodist Church

The Wales Synod, Representative Session (Present: 119; Voting: 75 for, 15 against) draws the attention of the Conference to the visible lack of racial diversity reflected within the leadership of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, specifically in relation to our senior leadership roles of President, Vice-President, and Chair of District, noting with regret that in the history of British Methodism we have had only one BAME President, and to date only one Chair of District of African/Caribbean descent and one of Asian descent.

In view of this, we would particularly like to encourage the Conference to:

- Ensure that each District appoints an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) officer.
- Be intentional in the development and mentoring of current and future Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Ministers and lay people for senior leadership roles within the Connexion.
- Particularly when it meets in a culturally diverse context within the Connexion, reflect the height, breadth, width, and depth of that diversity as best it can through its worship and fringe events.
- Support BAME local preachers, presbyteral and diaconal candidates, students, and probationers to flourish into the fullness of their vocations as prophets, pastors and teachers.
- Create a safer environment through race awareness training as a standard for circuit stewards and district officers.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wales Synod for its memorial. The Conference sadly recognises the visible lack of racial diversity reflected within leadership of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The Conference would like to draw the attention of the Synod to the report *The Unfinished Agenda – Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church* contained within Section N of Part 2 of the Methodist Council report to this Conference. This report focuses on the sin of racism within the Methodist Church which is a

denial of the gospel. 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. One of the concerns within the report is the lack of diversity and inclusion within the leadership of the Church and the report supports and welcomes the action in the *Taking Forward Larger than Circuit* report (MC/17/11) which directs "... the Connexional Team to develop a programme of identification, encouragement and mentoring for potential candidates for appointment as a District Chair, bearing in mind the need to increase gender and ethnic diversity among the District Chairs".

The EDI Toolkit is now available on the Methodist Church website. Significant resources were expended in creating the toolkit, the purpose of which is to provide a learning experience that positively engages with equality, diversity and inclusion. Within the Toolkit is a race module, which can be easily used for race awareness training in local situations; to support Local Churches and Circuits, Circuit Stewards and district officers. The Conference encourages the proactive use of the EDI Toolkit across the Church.

The reply to this memorial is contained within the resolutions of the Conference relating to Section N of the Methodist Council report.

M25 WCC Programme to Combat Racism

In May 1969 a World Council of Churches' consultation on racism was held on Methodist premises in Notting Hill, which set the foundations for the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism.

The Notting Hill (35/14) Circuit Meeting (Present: 10; Voting: unanimous) wishes to draw attention to the 50th anniversary of this meeting, and the pioneering and significant work across the globe which emerged from it.

The Circuit Meeting remembers the Methodist Church's affirmation that racism is a denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and gives thanks for the Church's continuing work to oppose racial discrimination and its work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The Circuit Meeting recognises not only the enduring challenge of racism in Britain, but notes the disturbing rise in racist incidents since the referendum vote to leave the European Union, and petitions the Conference:

- to give prayerful consideration to ways in which this event might appropriately be commemorated and, with partners in other Churches in Britain and abroad, explore the possibility of holding a conference on the role of the Church in opposing racism in the present context;
- to encourage the Methodist people in their resolve to oppose racism and all forms of unfair discrimination.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Notting Hill Circuit Meeting for its memorial. The Conference sadly recognises the enduring challenge of racism in Britain and abroad and the rise in racist incidents since the referendum vote to leave the European Union.

The Conference would like to draw to the attention of the Circuit Meeting to the report *The Unfinished Agenda – Racial Justice and Inclusion in the Methodist Church* contained within Section N of Part 2 of the Methodist Council report to this Conference. This report focuses on the sin of racism within the Methodist Church which is a denial of the gospel. 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. The report maps recurrent themes over a fifty-year period. The Conference notes the resolutions passed in response to that report, and also the reply to the related memorial M24.

The Conference accepts this memorial and instructs the Methodist Council to consider the possibility of holding a conference on the role of the Church in opposing racism as this work moves forward.

M26 Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes

In 2013, the World Council of Churches published a ground-breaking new affirmation, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL), along with a practical guide to help “translate the new concepts [...] into missional actions in local congregations, mission organizations and missiological formation”. TTL is an important and inspiring document not only because of its focus on the Holy Spirit and mission spirituality, but also because of its convergence with other recent global mission statements (such as the Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment and Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*).

Global challenges such as climate change, inequalities of income and opportunity, migration and resurgent nationalism call us out of our comfort zone to search for God’s prophetic message and to discern where we are called to join in God’s mission. The WCC World Mission Conference 2018 will be an historic opportunity to reach across borders and denominations – and to face unprecedented global uncertainty with Christian unity in faith, hope and love.

The London District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 196; Voting: 192 for, 0 against), therefore requests that the Conference:

- (a) encourages the use of TTL and its practical guide in all Circuits to inform and inspire a missional spirituality that overflows in the respectful and holistic sharing of the Good News;
- (b) enables full participation of the British Methodist Church in the 2018 WCC World Mission Conference – ‘Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship’, which meets in Arusha, Tanzania, 8-13 March 2018 through prayer and the publicising of pre- and post-conference study materials;
- (c) directs the Connexional Team to allocate personnel to form a small and short-term reference group to aid full engagement with TTL and the World Mission Conference 2018;
- (d) allocates time on the agenda of the 2018 Methodist Conference to hear and discuss reports from the WCC World Mission Conference.

Reply

The Conference thanks the London District Synod for its memorial, and shares its excitement at the prospect of the 2018 World Mission Conference in Tanzania.

As part of our commitment to the work of the World Council of Churches, funding is already provided from the World Mission Fund and a further application for financial support for the conference is anticipated.

The Conference therefore accepts parts (a) and (b) of the memorial and draws the attention of the Methodist Church to the text of *Together Towards Life* which can be downloaded as a pdf from: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>

Recognising the need for the Connexional Team and the Conference to manage limited resources of people and time, the Conference declines parts (c) and (d) and instead:

- requests the Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee to act as a channel for dialogue and information about the 2018 World Mission Conference;
- requests the Conference Business Committee to consider how feedback from that event may best be heard when the Conference meets in 2018.

M27 Engaging effectively with the Prevent strategy

The Leeds District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 102; Voting: 99 for, 0 against) recognises the rich ethnic, cultural and multifaith diversity of our region and values the promotion of good interfaith relationships, dialogue and understanding.

This Synod, therefore, shares the concerns of the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group about some negative impacts of the UK government's Prevent strategy.

This strategy is intended to identify those at risk of radicalisation to extremism of any kind and to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. However, implementation of the strategy has, in some instances, fostered the misperception that extremism is solely a Muslim problem and has encouraged the false idea that any Muslim is a threat and to be feared. This Synod wholeheartedly rejects these negative assumptions about Muslims and their faith.

This Synod, therefore, requests the Conference:

- (a) to offer support and advice to Methodist chaplains in Higher Education and other chaplaincy contexts on how best to engage with the Prevent process in ways which do not compromise their valued interfaith relationships nor undermine their role as trusted critical friends within largely secular institutions;
- (b) to join chaplains and others in speaking out freely in the public arena where damage is seen to be done by the Prevent strategy.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Leeds District Synod for this memorial, the concerns of which are echoed in memorials M28, M29 and M30.

As the memorial indicates, Prevent is part of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy. Its aim is to reduce the threat to the UK from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It deals with all forms of terrorism and with non-violent extremism. The Conference wholeheartedly supports the aim of challenging potentially harmful forms of extremism and preventing people being drawn into terrorism. The concern expressed here is about the unintended consequences of the Government's approach.

The memorial draws the attention of the Conference to the duty that requires those in local authorities, the NHS, schools and universities amongst others to have "due regard" to the need to prevent terrorism. In universities, as this memorial and others show, higher education chaplains have in some cases found themselves required to participate in drawing up and implementing university Prevent strategies. The Conference accepts that these requirements sometimes appear to be in conflict with chaplains' duties.

Schools also have statutory duties under Prevent. Perhaps because Methodist schools generally care for younger children, and Prevent is held alongside safeguarding responsibilities in many schools, there appears to be less cause for concern about the duty amongst Methodist school leaders.

The Conference recognises the urgent need to tackle extremism and hatred in the UK, especially that involving violence, from whatever source. However, the Conference is profoundly disturbed that the implementation of the strategy appears to have undermined community relations in some areas and that Muslims in particular have felt targeted.

It is for these reasons and others that the Secretary of the Conference joined those signing a statement in April 2017 calling for an independent review of Prevent.

The Conference recognises the many calls on the resources of the Connexional Team. The Conference, therefore, responds positively to this memorial but declines the specific requests contained in it and instead asks the Methodist Council:

- (a) to request JPIT to work with ecumenical partners to bring the concerns identified by the Church to the attention of the relevant government departments;
- (b) to request the DMLN, working with JPIT, to facilitate a round table consultation with participants from the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group and other relevant parties, to explore the issues raised by this memorial, in the expectation that the participants themselves will be best placed to develop resources and provide support. The outcomes from this consultation should also inform the concerns shared with the Government.

M28 Engaging effectively with the Prevent strategy

The Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 140; Voting: unanimous) recognises and values the increasingly diverse ethnic, cultural and faith profile of our communities. However, we also acknowledge that there are some deep-seated tensions in the north-east of England. Since the EU referendum in June 2016 we have seen an increase in English Defence League activity in our area, a higher number of reported incidents of Islamophobia (according to official Northumbria Police statistics) and the apparent legitimisation of low-level racism.

This situation is not being helped by the UK Government's Prevent strategy. Launched as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, this strategy is intended to identify those at risk of radicalisation to extremism, whatever form that may take, and to prevent vulnerable individuals from being drawn into terrorist activity. Education providers (including schools, colleges and universities) have been given a mandatory responsibility for managing, responding to and, in some cases, reporting individuals who are believed to be at risk of radicalisation within their institutions. While the strategy is not targeted specifically at any one group or community, ground-level implementation has contributed to a growing misconception that extremism is solely a Muslim problem and that Muslim members of our communities should be regarded as a threat.

This Synod shares the concerns of the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group about some of the negative impacts of the Prevent strategy, the related assumptions about Muslim people and their faith, and the implications for freedom of religious expression.

Therefore, the Synod requests that the Conference:

- (a) instructs the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) to investigate the impact of the Prevent strategy and make the findings known in the public arena;
- (b) formulates an official and distinctive Methodist stance on how the Church relates to the Prevent strategy.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M29 Engaging effectively with the Prevent strategy

The London District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 192; Voting: 185 for, 1 against), recognises the rich ethnic, cultural and faith diversity of London, and our strong history of positive engagement with leaders of other faith communities in political and social action.

This Synod, therefore, shares the concerns of the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group, and the experience of local teachers and educators, about the negative impacts and increased racism and Islamophobia which has been experienced as a consequence of the UK government's Prevent strategy.

The Prevent strategy is intended to identify those at risk of radicalisation to extremism, whatever form that may take, and to prevent vulnerable individuals from being drawn into terrorist activity. Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, education providers (including schools, colleges and universities)

have been given a mandatory responsibility for managing, responding to and, in some cases, reporting, individuals who are believed to be at risk of radicalisation within their institutions. The result is that chaplains and educators can feel negatively compromised in their work, and in their relationships with students and staff in their institutions.

While the strategy is not overtly targeted at any one group or community, implementation on the ground has contributed to a growing misconception that extremism is solely a Muslim problem and that Muslim members of our communities should be feared as a threat.

This Synod, therefore, requests that the Conference:

- (a) formulates an official and distinctively Methodist stance on how the Church relates to the Prevent strategy, and commits to the dissemination of this into local contexts and Circuits;
- (b) requests JPIT to investigate the impact of the Prevent strategy and make its findings known in the public arena;
- (c) invites a round table consultation be held with participants from the Methodist Higher Education Chaplains' Group, Methodist Schools, and the Safeguarding Team to produce resources to support chaplains and teachers in their work, in ways which enable interfaith relationships in local contexts and maintain trust and relationships with secular institutions.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M30 Engaging effectively with the Prevent strategy

The Sheffield District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 88; Voting: 85 for, 0 against) welcomes Notice of Motion 201(P) from the 2016 Conference, which states:

“Believing that racism is a denial of the gospel and that to stay silent when others are abused is to collude with those who seek to promote hatred and division, the Methodist Conference calls:

- on the Methodist people to challenge racism and discrimination;
- for a political debate which neither demonises any nor leaves the vulnerable (the foreigner, the immigrant and refugee) in danger of victimisation;
- on political leaders to work together for the good of the whole community putting the needs of the nation before party politics;
- on all those in positions of power and authority to hear the voices of those who have been marginalised and alienated and to respond to them in ways which offer real hope for the future.”

The Synod also notes that, since the June referendum last year, reported instances of hate crime have increased significantly, reflecting a perceived increase in tensions between groups of differing nationalities, ethnicities and religions. The Sheffield Synod, which represents many very diverse local communities, celebrates the excellent and effective work which is often being done at grassroots level, to draw communities together and promote cohesion.

Nevertheless, the Synod believes that such cohesion is in danger of being undermined, in part by the UK government's strategy on preventing violent extremism ('Prevent'), which is designed to identify and support those who may be isolated and vulnerable to radicalisation. While this is a valuable aim, many involved in interfaith work are increasingly identifying, in the rhetoric surrounding Prevent and often in its implementation, a disproportionate focus on Islamic extremism. This deepens a sense of fear and suspicion of Muslims, creating false stereotypes and potentially increasing the sense of isolation and vulnerability among those who are visibly followers of Islam.

This Synod therefore calls on the Conference to:

- (a) request JPIT, the Methodist-URC Inter Faith Relations Group, and other relevant bodies to examine the impact of media rhetoric and government policy (including the UK government's Prevent strategy) on community cohesion and interfaith relations;
- (b) direct the development of resources to better share expertise, to support Methodist congregations engaged in the work of building community cohesion at a local level;
- (c) direct the Connexional Team to consider how it can best offer theological and practical support to those with legal or pastoral responsibilities under the Prevent strategy.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M31 Same-sex marriage

The Birmingham District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 114; Voting: 91 for, 12 against) expresses its thanks to the Marriage and Relationships Task Group which reported to the Conference in 2016 and assures the Conference of its prayers and encouragement for the newly appointed task group in their work. The Synod recalls that it has sent memorials to the Conference in 2012 (on the blessing of civil partnerships) and in 2014 (on same-sex marriage) and reaffirms its commitment to work for an inclusive Church. The Synod believes that fully including LGBT+ people is essential to the mission of the Church in the 21st century. Within the District there are ministers and churches who would gladly celebrate same-sex marriages as well as those who would not feel able in conscience to do so. The Synod believes we must allow those ministers and churches who feel so called by God to celebrate same-sex marriages while not placing others under any obligation or expectation to participate. It therefore requests the Conference to encourage the Task Group to bring in its report in 2018 recommendations which will enable this to happen.

Reply

The Conference is grateful to the Birmingham District Synod for its prayers and encouragement for the group appointed by the 2016 Conference (Resolution 29/8a) to undertake the task necessitated by its adoption of Resolution 29/7: "The Conference directs that a new Statement of the judgment of the Conference on marriage and relationships shall be prepared and that, as part of the process, the definition of marriage should be revisited."

The task group is aware that its remit includes consideration of the possibility of ministers and churches celebrating same-sex marriages, but also that the remit is wider than that. The task group is also aware that there is a wide range of views held strongly and in good conscience in the Methodist Church on all the issues before it. It is undertaking its work and considering its conclusions with all speed in order to bring material in the first instance, as required, to the 2018 Conference. The detailed reply to this memorial will therefore be in the resolutions of that Conference.

M32 Investment in fossil fuels

The Central Scotland (31/9) Circuit Meeting (Present: 12; Voting: 10 for, 0 against) requests that the Methodist Council oversees a process with a view to issuing advice that the Methodist Church divests all of its investments in fossil fuel industries (coal, gas, oil) by the 2022 Conference and seeks to invest a significant and growing proportion of its overall investment portfolio in renewable energy and infrastructure investments that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Central Scotland Circuit Meeting for its memorial.

The Conference has examined the question of Methodist investment in fossil fuels over a number of years, most recently in 2014 and 2015.

The Conference Statement, *Hope in God's Future* (2009), was not specific on the question of divestment from fossil fuels, but the increasing urgency of the situation in recent years has made the ethical questions raised by different fuels more critical. The Conference has acknowledged that a need for a radical change in our reliance on fossil fuels is increasingly urgent. If we are to limit warming to well below 2°C, nations need to reduce emissions dramatically.

In 2014, the Conference directed the Methodist Council through JACEI to undertake a review of the Central Finance Board (CFB)'s climate change policy with specific reference to the oil, gas and coal extraction sectors but stated that this should be "without prejudice to a specific commitment to divest". The report to the Methodist Conference of 2015 stated: "The JACEI advice on specific fuels should be regularly reviewed against internationally agreed action that is considered necessary to limit global warming to two degrees and in due course prioritise other fossil fuels as necessary."

In 2015 the Conference rejected the request in a memorial which called for total divestment from oil and gas companies by the end of 2018. The CFB continues to evaluate companies for investment on a case-by-case basis using the guidance of JACEI and CFB policies.

The CFB invests Methodist money in accordance with ethical investment policies, whilst seeking to achieve above average returns for the Church and other clients. Following advice from JACEI, the CFB implements its investment approach to climate change according to three policies, which are available on the CFB website: *Climate Change* (2009), *Implications for the Electricity Generation Industry* (2013) and *Implications for different fuels* (2015). Together these policies set a framework for lowering the carbon footprint of CFB's portfolio, focusing engagement on companies with the greatest intensity of carbon emissions, and considering whether companies' business models imply a low probability of meeting emission reduction targets. CFB policies on climate change have also led to almost twenty companies in the coal, oil and gas, and electricity sectors being excluded from investment, including divestment from six shareholdings.

The CFB reports that, as an investor, it is in a position to engage on both the investment and ethical imperative for action on climate change. Working with the Church Investors Group it has encouraged companies to provide a more comprehensive disclosure of their carbon emissions and it takes emissions disclosure into account when it votes at company AGMs. As a founder member of the 'Aiming for A' investor coalition, the CFB co-filed shareholder resolutions at the AGMs of BP, Shell, Anglo American, and Rio Tinto, which were overwhelmingly passed. The resolutions required companies to show how they will transition to a low carbon world and investors are now engaging with the results.

The CFB is also a founder member of the Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI), which helps asset owners assess companies' own emissions, including how expected future performance compares to targets and pledges made as part of the Paris Agreement. This additional tool will better enable the CFB to determine how quickly companies are transitioning and which companies merit further intensive engagement, or even divestment or exclusion.

Oil and gas companies, particularly those focused on gas which is an important fuel needed for a realistic transition to a low carbon world, merit different treatment to coal companies. CFB policies recognise the differences and also distinguish between companies which align their business investment plans to be consistent with a scenario of well below 2°C and those many which do not.

Investor engagement with oil and gas companies has helped bring about some changes in behaviour but many investment plans are still predicated on average temperatures rising above 2°C. Given the urgency of action required for transition to low carbon economies confirmed by the Paris COP21, pressure to set a timescale for successful engagement or even divestment is understandable.

The Conference acknowledges that CFB retains responsibility for investment decisions, including on the merits of renewable or infrastructure investments, with implications for portfolio risk and return. Ethical choices need to be made in the context of the fiduciary responsibilities of the underlying Methodist investing organisations, including the pension schemes for ministers and lay employees. For example, the exclusion of all oil and gas companies would lead to total ethical exclusions forming 27% of the FTSE All Share index, compared to the current 15%. The removal of fossil fuel companies from a portfolio by a specific date raises questions of investment risk on which key stakeholders (such as the pension fund trustees) would need to be consulted.

The Conference therefore affirms the ethical basis of this memorial, which is that if engagement with companies that are heavily dependent on the extraction of fossil fuels does not lead to business models compatible with the ambition of the Paris agreement, disinvestment will ultimately be the response.

However, the Conference does not at this time accept the specific request in the memorial as it could be argued that there is further work to do on the ethical and investment questions related to fossil fuels before final decisions can be taken on disinvestment.

Therefore, the Conference asks the Methodist Council to request JACEI to:

- (a) examine the pace of change in the extractive industries sector;
- (b) in the light of the increasing urgency for more global action, continue actively to consider disinvestment criteria, timescales, and consultation processes required to disinvest from oil and gas companies that fail to comply with the ethical basis outlined above;
- (c) report to the Conference in 2018, with the expectation that if any such company in which the Church invests has not aligned their business investment plans with the Paris Agreement target of a global temperature rise well below 2 degrees, there would be a recommendation that the Church disinvest from such a company by the 2020 Conference.

M33 The Scotland District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 56; Voting: 45 for, 3 against)

This memorial was received with the same text as M32, with the exception of replacing “(coal, gas, oil)” with “(coal, gas, oil, industrial peat)”. The Conference adopts the same reply.

M34 Investment in fossil fuels

The Bristol District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 72; Voting: 67 for, 0 against) requests that the Methodist Conference instructs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Methodist Church entirely divests from fossil fuel industries (coal, gas and oil) by the 2022 Conference, and seeks to invest a significant and growing proportion of its portfolio in renewable energy and infrastructure investments that will urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M32.

M35 Investment in fossil fuels

The Stratford and Evesham (5/15) Circuit Meeting (Present: 24; Voting: 23 for, 1 against) welcomes the Transition Pathway Initiative on global warming supported, among others, by the Methodist Finance Board and the Church of England, but fears that its targets in relation to timing and holding temperature increase to 1.5 degrees are seriously insufficient. It further fears that fossil fuel companies are an increasingly risky investment. It therefore requests that the Methodist Council oversees a process, in company with the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI), with a view to issuing robust advice that the Methodist Church entirely divest from fossil fuel industries (coal, gas and oil) by the 2020 Conference, and

seeks to invest a significant and growing proportion of its portfolio in renewable energy and infrastructure investments that will urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M32.

M36 The Birmingham District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 114; Voting: 73 for, 23 against)

This memorial was received with the same text as M35. The Conference adopts the same reply as to M32.

M37 Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 136; Voting: 102 for, 1 against) notes that on 2 November 2017 it will be 100 years since the Balfour Declaration was signed by the then British Foreign Secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour.

The Declaration stated:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Whilst the Declaration led to the creation of the State of Israel, and we recognise the existence of the state of Israel within its pre-1967 borders, we should also recognise the very damaging consequences for the Palestinian people when their "civil and religious rights" have not been protected, which is manifested by the removal of a substantial part of the Palestinian population from their homeland as refugees, as well as the current 50-year Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Today, the Palestinian nation is divided into around 6 million people in refugee camps, around 3 million living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, up to 2 million living under siege in Gaza and around 1.8 million as citizens of Israel.

Given the deep historical significance of the Balfour Declaration in the context of Palestine/Israel, the Synod therefore asks the Conference:

- (a) to recognise that British Governments have failed to fulfil the second part of the Balfour Declaration, namely "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine";
- (b) to urge the British Government to make an official acknowledgement of the damaging consequences of failing to uphold the promises made to non-Jewish communities in the Balfour Declaration;
- (c) to issue a similar statement of regret to the Middle East Council of Churches;
- (d) to encourage the Methodist people to learn more about the situation and expectations of Palestinian Christians, including those which are outlined in their Kairos Document of 2009, and to take prayerful action towards justice and peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M22.

M38 Nuclear weapons ban treaty

The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 136; Voting: 96 for, 1 against) notes that during 2017, the United Nations (UN) is convening the negotiation of a nuclear weapons ban treaty and regrets that Her Majesty's Government is not participating in the negotiations.

The nuclear weapons ban treaty will render the use, deployment and further development of nuclear weapon systems illegal under international law, which will follow other international treaties such as the chemical weapons and biological ban treaties which were introduced because such indiscriminate weapons are clearly incompatible with the principle of protection of civilians in international humanitarian law.

Further, the treaty will give the international community the opportunity to work towards a world free from the risk of the devastating impacts of nuclear weapons. Currently even a small scale local exchange would expose the world to devastating impacts. It would give rise not only to an immediate, devastating and non-discriminated loss of life but would also have an impact on the global environment which would be wide-ranging and affect many future generations. The Synod believes that the use, or potential use, of nuclear weapons threatens the God-given dignity and worth of all human beings and the whole of creation.

The Synod believes that the UK's reputation and desire to promote international law and to encourage multilateral disarmament should compel the UK to support actively this important UN process.

Therefore, the Synod asks the Conference to direct the Secretary of the Conference to write to Her Majesty's Government urging it to engage with the UN process at the earliest opportunity and to publish the text of the letter and its response on the Methodist Church website.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Synod for its memorial. In 2014, the Conference adopted Notice of Motion 209 calling for "the negotiation of a new international treaty to bring about the elimination of all nuclear weapons". In 2018 the United Nations will host a High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament. Following the UK's opposition to the negotiation of a nuclear ban treaty the Conference urges the Government to use the high level meeting in 2018 to advocate for robust action and to seek to restore confidence in the UK's commitment to multilateral disarmament. The Conference draws attention to new resources published by the Joint Public Issues Team on the nuclear ban treaty and multilateral disarmament.

The Conference therefore accepts the memorial.

M39 Welcoming refugees

The York and Hull District Synod, Representative Session (Present 102; Voting 99 for, 1 against) has requested that synod representatives write to their local MPs in the District to express their concern about the situation regarding Syrian and other refugees.

In this context, the Synod is pleased to note that the overseas aid budget has been maintained at 0.7% of GDP. This will help to reduce the inequalities between nations that are a driving force for irregular migration. The Synod is also pleased to note that some aid is being focused on the camps in countries adjacent to Syria. Enhancing the experience of good governance in the camps will build a better Syria after the conflict.

The Synod is deeply disappointed with the progress towards accepting 20,000 people from those camps as particularly vulnerable persons. The Synod is also deeply disappointed that the "Dubs Children" scheme for vulnerable children has been curtailed at 350 against a suggested 3000 when the amendment was included in the Immigration Act 2016. We hope that this is being done in a way that will lay the foundation for a better Syria.

This is perceived as an unwillingness to appreciate the contribution of migrants and refugees to our society and to honour the tradition of hospitality to asylum seekers that government ministers are all too ready to boast about.

The Synod therefore requests that the Conference considers ways in which it can influence the Government and encourage it to review its actions in relation to the treatment of displaced persons, ensuring that their welfare is high on the Government's agenda. In particular, it asks that the Conference puts pressure on the Government to review its decision not to accept the number of unaccompanied child refugees originally intended under the Dubs amendment.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M20.