

56. Methodist Diaconal Order General Report

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The Methodist Diaconal Order is a Christ-centred, prayerful, pioneering, Religious Order, committed to modelling God's love in action.

Our life together as deacons and members of the Order

Membership:

The Methodist Diaconal Order currently has a complement of 249 members:

117 in the active work (including four diaconal probationers, and three diaconal ordinands)

117 supernumerary deacons

Nine diaconal students (four of which are to be stationed by the Conference as diaconal probationers)

Two deacons hold 'without appointment' status

One deacon holds 'permission to study' status

One authorised deacon and one associate deacon in the active work

One supernumerary associate deacon

12 'Associate members' and a number of 'Friends' who commit to support the Order through prayer and advocacy.

Since the MDO report to the Conference 2024:

- Two full members have died
- Six diaconal probationers have been received into Full Connexion and full membership of the Order, and ordained into the diaconate within the universal Church.
- One ordained diaconal probationer was received into Full Connexion and full membership of the Order
- Four people were accepted as candidates for training in 2024 and four further candidates will be recommended to the Conference 2025
- Three members are seeking the permission of the Conference, to 'sit down' and one has been granted permission by the President during the year.

The Order is enjoying settling into its new home in new Methodist Church House. We are grateful to our neighbours in the House for their care, interest and support of those of us based in the MDO Centre and for the work of deacons and the MDO within the Connexion. In October we both celebrated the opening of the new MDO Centre and welcomed our new Deputy Warden, Michelle Legumi, in a service presided over by Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Conference. These were delightful events full of prayer, love and cake!

Appreciations:

The terms of office of two Chairs of MDO work come to an end this year:

The Chair of the MDO Support and Advisory Group (SAG), Rachel Lampard has been a strong and supportive friend of deacons for a very long time and we know that that will not end as she retires as the chair of MDO SAG. This is a post Rachel has held for the last six years. We have been deeply blessed by her integrity and commitment, and have appreciated greatly her clear leadership and kind companionship to the MDO with particular concern for the Warden and Deputy Warden. We give thanks to God and to Rachel for her service and witness among us.

The Chair of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee, the Revd Dr David Hinchliffe has gently and wisely led the DSSC, which supports and advises the work of the Warden in preparing and matching deacons and Circuits for recommending to the Conference for stationing. We have appreciated David's dedication and service, his humour and friendship, and we give thanks to God and to David for all he has generously offered to the MDO.

Our relationship with other diaconal orders and deacons

The MDO continues to be active in praying for, collaborating with and supporting other diaconal orders, seeking to build and strengthen the ecumenical diaconal community. This year three members and a diaconal student of the MDO will travel in July to participate in the World Diakonia Conference in Tanzania.

At this year's Convocation as part of our programme we explored with several siblings from a host of denominations and contexts the current Diaconal Landscape. Our sibling guests included deacons/deaconesses/diaconal workers from the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Reformed Church, and other Methodist global contexts - the Caribbean, Ireland and Southern Africa. In addition, the Connexional Ecumenical Officer, the Revd Steven Cooper, joined us.

There was a panel discussion facilitated by two deacons from the Scottish Episcopal Church and the MDO. This was followed by a facilitated World Café style conversation; all present were invited to consider three questions in advance of the gathering:

- Scriptural Calling: What is the key text(s) that have accompanied you through your vocational life?
- Diaconal Leadership: What kind of leadership are we, as deacons, called to?
- Prophetic ministry: What does it mean to offer a prophetic ministry? Where/ what are the opportunities to be prophetic? How and who are we being called to encourage?

We heard one another's stories and noticed how much resonated within the vocational calling to service, justice, community building, prayer and proclamation of God's love in action. We recognised some shared concerns around how the ministry of deacons can be misunderstood; and the vital part of their role to remind and stir up the Church in its call to model the life of Jesus Christ the servant, and to encourage all who follow Christ in their diaconal ministry as part of discipleship. We noted too where our churches and traditions diverged, particularly in how vocations are nurtured and supported, and deacons/diaconal workers are appointed, and how such ministry is valued and encouraged. It was humbling and challenging to hear some of these differences in contrast to this Church's understanding and affirmation of the diaconal ministry of deacons and of the MDO.

This was an inspirational time, and there is much to continue to pray and ponder with. We will continue this dialogue with our siblings, seeking to notice God's leading and praying that together we will grasp the holy opportunities and invitations as they arise.

The Convocation:

The theme for our Convocation this year was 'Continuing to become the Order God desires us to be' and drew upon Paul's Letter to the Philippians 1:1-11 and the MDO Rule of Life, which highlights this as one of its purposes, for the sake of God's world and God's glory.

As we met for Convocation with its opportunities for gathering and fellowship, support and care, joy and laughter, we remained mindful of God's world and its brokenness – the communities in which we live and serve, and news from world situations and concerns around human rights. We prayed with our brother deacons from the Roman Catholic Church as the Conclave met, for the anniversary of Victory in Europe, and for the many of the world's situations and for those who live in fear because of prejudice and hatred.

Our reflecting and praying were enabled, challenged and supported by a daily pattern of prayer and also by those who led or facilitated our sessions.

The retiring Chair of the MDO Support and Advisory group Rachel Lampard and two members of the MDO creatively enabled the Convocation to reflect theologically on this theme using the Scriptures, art and poetry. Each invited us in different and insightful ways to see our unique selves as God sees us and to honour that self. In doing so we can then move to honour others and in this way we can continue to participate in that good work God has begun in each of us, that we may become the Order and the individuals God created us to be.

The President and Vice-President of the Conference, the Revd Helen Cameron and Carolyn Godfrey, joined the Convocation. Throughout the Convocation they continually offered to us a ministry of care and affirmation, of inspiration and gentle challenge. Two examples: In our Prayer Service for the World, the Vice-President encouraged us

to allow ourselves to be drawn back to the Shepherd finding the green pastures, still waters and places to restore the soul, to enable resilience and faithfulness in uncertain times, so we are not personally overwhelmed as we seek to model and share God's love for all and challenge unjust practices. In the Service of Rededication the President, through the story of Bartimaeus urged us and God's whole Church to 'take heart and to listen – he is calling you'; to throw off our cloaks and to be courageous like Bartimaeus – to know/believe that Jesus will transform our lives, so with Jesus we can follow that calling: to be in solidarity with others and to speak up in a time of uncertainty.

The Methodist Liaison Officer in Jerusalem, the Revd David Hardman, also joined the Convocation and offered generously of his time, wisdom and his prayerful hopes. Through a session called 'Holy Land?' he helped us to be more informed in our prayer and in our concern, without being partisan and becoming overwhelmed. The Convocation wrote to the Christians and Church Leaders in Palestine, expressing our solidarity with them and committing to our continued praying for them and the situation in the Holy Land. The collection of the Convocation will also go to the Gaza Appeal.

We were also accompanied by representatives of All We Can and members of the Connexional Team, including the Children and Youth Team and the Learning Network, who led sessions, activities and conversations to inspire and resource us in our ministry.

Creating God, your way of love makes all things new.

Plant seeds of confidence and joy in our hearts,

so trusting our lives to you, we may become mirrors of your love in the world.

God's love present and working in us now, does more than we can imagine: Glory to God!

(The Convocation Prayer)

*****RESOLUTIONS**

56/1. The Conference received the Report.

56/2. The Conference resolved that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire, from Tuesday 5 May until Friday 8 May 2026.