

61. DISTRICT RESOLUTIONS

Note: the Conference received three identical resolutions with similar introductions. The Agenda therefore includes the first part of each introduction followed by the text that is common to all three.

Birmingham District

1. The Synod of the Birmingham District, meeting in its Representative Session (Present: 98; For: 77; Against: 5) notes with significant concern the issues around ministerial work-life balance, stress and burnout raised in its Presbyteral Session, and invites the Methodist Conference of 2025 to affirm its commitment to the well-being of all ministers in Full Connexion and to direct that proposals be developed to address these issues.
2. The Conference shares in a covenantal relationship with those ministers, both Presbyteral and Diaconal, who are in Full Connexion. This is a mutual relationship, and for its part the Conference provides the broad context for the exercising of these two orders of ministry, in part by setting certain terms, conditions, and expectations on the work of those in Full Connexion. The Conference's commitment to that covenant relationship with its ministers is enacted in practical terms throughout the Connexion, not least in circuits and districts.
3. Over the last few years there has been growing concern amongst those in the active work with regards to well-being, especially in relation to their ability to properly balance the demands of Church, family, social and personal commitments. A notable number of ministers have described themselves as being 'at the edge', with others having become burnt out. In turn, this leads to a reduction both in the level of work undertaken and in the quality of life of the ministers, their families and friends, and the communities they serve.
4. Within the Birmingham District many in the active work are experiencing high levels of stress, exhaustion, and significant risk of burnout, and we understand that this is a situation that is replicated across the Connexion. We therefore call on the Conference to address these issues, and in particular to take active and definite steps in reducing the number of sessions worked by ministers in order to increase work-life balance and reduce burnout.

Northampton District

1. The Northampton District, meeting in its Presbyteral Session (present: 73 for: 66 against: 2), notes with significant concern issues around ministerial work-life balance, stress and burnout, and invites the Methodist Conference of 2025 to commit to measures that would address these issues.
2. The Conference shares in a covenantal relationship with those ministers, both presbyteral and diaconal, who are in Full Connexion. This is a mutual relationship, and for its part the Conference provides the broad context for the exercising of these two orders of ministry, in part by setting certain terms, conditions, and expectations on the work of those in Full Connexion.
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4. Within this District many in the active work are experiencing high levels of stress, exhaustion, and significant risk of burnout, and we understand this is a situation that is replicated across the

Connexion. We therefore ask the Conference to discuss in its Representative Session the proposed resolution and call on them to take active and definite steps in reducing the number of sessions worked by ministers in order to increase work-life balance and reduce burnout.

Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District

1. The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District, meeting in its Presbyteral Session (voting as follows: Present: 67; For: 49; Against: 3), notes with significant concern issues around ministerial work-life balance, stress and burnout, and invites the Methodist Conference of 2025 to commit to measures that would address these issues.
2. The Conference shares in a covenantal relationship with those ministers, both Presbyteral and Diaconal, who are in Full Connexion. This is a mutual relationship, and for its part the Conference provides the broad context for the exercising of these two orders of ministry, in part by setting certain terms, conditions, and expectations on the work of those in Full Connexion.
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4. Within this District many in the active work are experiencing high levels of stress, exhaustion, and significant risk of burnout, and we understand this is a situation that is replicated across the Connexion. We therefore ask the Conference to discuss in its Representative Session the proposed resolution and call on them to take active and definite steps in reducing the number of sessions worked by ministers in order to increase work-life balance and reduce burnout.

Text common to all three submissions

5. Significant research has been conducted in recent years on the nature of burnout and how occurrences relate to the hours worked by an individual (see Appendix 1). While the impact of high stress, exhaustion and burnout on individual ministers, churches and circuits is not quantifiable, we do know that in 2022-2023¹ £229,339 was spent on recuperative years and £110,793 was spent on sick leave (this figure only accounts for leave which has lasted for more than 6 consecutive months). The true cost of sick leave in terms of reduced work and reduced quality of ministerial lives and relationships is, of course, unknown.
6. Currently, the Guidance in CPD (Book VII, Part 3: Holidays) makes clear that a full-time appointment is assumed to involve 12 sessions a week, where a session is a morning, afternoon or evening. This leads to working six days a week, or, in order to reduce the number of days working, regularly undertaking 3 sessions per day. Accepting the average session is 3.5-4 hours, 12 sessions equates to 42-48 hours per week. Although we would want to be careful in making direct comparison to 'employed work', we do note that the average number of hours worked by a full-time employee has fallen in recent years from 38.7 (1997) to 36.6 (2024)². Alongside this the Connexional Team now recruits full-time posts at 35 hours per week. This equates to 10 worked sessions if each was at the lower end of 3.5 hours per session.
7. Taking the need to reduce levels of work-related stress, ill-health and burnout, and the clear move toward reducing working hours in wider society, we believe it is time both to invest in proper analysis of ministerial stress, and provide ways of reducing this, with one clear and

¹ [Conference 2024 Agenda](#)

² [Average actual weekly hours of work for full-time workers \(seasonally adjusted\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

identifiable step being the reduction of expected sessions from 12 to 10 per week, thereby creating greater ability and flexibility for ministers to engage in the rest, recreation, exercise, fellowship, and family life that CPD also recognises as necessary for a healthy ministerial life.

8. In offering this resolution, we recognise that it has been long held that the provision of a stipend is not payment for work done but is instead a gift such that ministers in the active work do not need to seek employment elsewhere. We are therefore not proposing any consequent change to the stipend level. However, if the number of sessions for a full-time appointment is changed, there should be a change in the calculation for those in less than full time appointments - whereas someone currently undertaking duties for 6/12 sessions receives 50% stipend this would change to 6/10 sessions and therefore equate to 60%, while someone being offered a role at 50% would be expected to work 5/10 sessions.

***RESOLUTION

61/1. The Conference:

- a. **affirmed its commitment to the well-being of all ministers in Full Connexion;**
- b. **directed the Ministries Committee to work with others to bring forward proposals to assess and address the high stress levels amongst ministers stationed by the Conference.**

Appendix

Burnout

The social psychologist Christina Maslach has described burnout as “an erosion of the soul caused by a deterioration of one’s values, dignity, spirit, and will”. The chief executive of the Guild of Health and St Raphael, the Revd Dr Gillian Straine, lists its symptoms: “Emotional exhaustion, loss of empathy. You want to be alone. You fantasise that you’re somewhere else. You feel unwell, pessimistic, irritable, overwhelmed. You don’t care any more.”³

The risk factors for burnout for the general workforce include⁴:

- Unreasonable time pressures
- Lack of communication / support from senior managers
- Lack of role clarity
- Unmanageable workload
- Feeling of having no control over your work / life
- Being mistreated by colleagues, management, clients
- High stress work
- Lack of recognition
- Working long hours
- Poor work life balance
- Not getting enough rest

For those in ministry there has been an identification of more specific risk factors alongside those identified above⁵:

- Playing different roles throughout the day
- Lack of boundaries exacerbated by living within a community
- Livelihood, social life and housing are all intertwined
- Not being able to share how we are feeling – putting on a mask
- Toxic criticism
- Gossip
- Lack of support

³ [Clergy well-being: the smoke before the burnout](#)

⁴ [Burnout: Symptoms, Risk Factors, Prevention, Treatment](#)

⁵ [Clergy well-being: the smoke before the burnout](#)

- Endless schemes and initiatives

Not only does burnout cause a loss in productivity or the feeling of stress it can have serious affects on both physical and mental health leading to⁶:

- High cholesterol levels
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Coronary Heart Disease (increasing risk of Heart Attack)
- Musculoskeletal pain
- Depression

Working Hours

Whilst there are several different causes of burnout, a number of key factors relate to the number of hours worked. Equally, a key protective factor is having more time away from work and therefore time to be with family, friends, to undertake exercise or a hobby, etc.

Whilst the Resolution is not asking to move to a four-day week, we do believe research from studies relating to the effects of reducing the working week to four days shows significant benefits associated with reducing work hours⁷⁸. Since a 2022 trial of the four-day working week:

- 56/61 participating companies have continued 4 day week
- 39% of employees said they were less stressed
- 71% had reduced levels of burnout
- 43% felt an improvement in their mental health
- 46% reported a reduction in fatigue
- 54% said they had significantly better work-life balance
- 54% reduced staff turnover

Not only is a reduction in hours beneficial to those in the active work it would also have benefits to the church. With recent research from the University of Reading showing⁹:

- Increase in productivity
- Reduced stress
- Reduced sick leave
- Happier workforce
- Increased job satisfaction
- Reduces the number of car journeys
- More likely to spend time with family / friends
- More likely to eat / cook properly

⁶ [Physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout: A systematic review of prospective studies | PLOS ONE](#)

⁷ UK Research & Innovation: [A four-day working week improves mental and physical health – UKRI](#)

⁸ [The 4 Day Week UK Pilot Programme Results — 4 Day Week Global](#)

⁹ [Four-day-week-white-paper-FINAL.pdf](#)