

9. Methodist Forces Board

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1. The tempo of activity this year has remained surprisingly quick, given that the conflicts requiring large numbers of personnel have now ended. At the time of writing, there are still three chaplains deployed to areas of risk. Chaplaincy in all three services is operating below their ideal capacity. The drawdown from Germany continues and the threat of ISIS remains a key feature of security concern which needs chaplaincy support on an ongoing basis. One of the Methodist Chaplains was deployed to Sierra Leone in the summer of 2015 as part of the British response to the Ebola crisis, and a short audio-visual presentation about that experience is now available on the website.
2. Our complement of chaplains has remained stable (29 commissioned chaplains: 8 Royal Navy, 13 Army, 8 Royal Air Force and 2 part-time Army Reserve Chaplains).
3. The Secretary and the Chair of the Board were again privileged to accompany the President of the Conference on the annual visit to the Forces, which this year was to the Royal Navy. The President was welcomed to Plymouth by the Royal Marines at HMS Portland, including a trip on the river Tamar in a jet-propelled landing craft. On the following day the President visited the Royal Navy initial training establishment, HMS Raleigh at Torpoint where the President was Guest of Honour at a Passing Out Parade. The President was welcomed to the Methodist Tri-service Forces Chaplains Conference at Amport House in February. This was an inspiring, enriching and sometimes hilarious visit which was greatly appreciated. We were also joined for this conference by Lucy Moore, the originator of 'Messy Church' and Mark Chester, founder of 'Who Let the Dads Out'. As every year, the Revd Dr Andrew Wood the Chair of District with responsibility for Chaplains as they leave the Forces was present throughout this conference. Along with Doug Swanney, Andrew Wood led a session on current issues facing the Methodist Church.
4. The Forces Board again thanks the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust for its excellent financial support. It is this provision that has allowed the Board to continue to fund a range of projects including a children and youth work project within the Aldershot garrison town and supported by North Camp Methodist Church. The Board also sustains a full-time pastoral worker with the Haven Project at HMS SULTAN in Gosport and a part-time pastoral worker to support the chaplaincy at the Tri-service Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) in Northwood. After a false start, the Board has recruited a new full-time Families Worker to work with the two congregations (Roman Catholic and Protestant) at St Alban's MOD Church linked to the Chaplaincy at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham. This piece of work will take special note of the *We Are Family* report (2015, Consultative Group on Ministry among Children and The Methodist Church with Merida Associates). A new piece of work with families is now underway at RAF BENSON and the Board is in the process of recruiting a Pastoral Worker for JITG Chicksands.
5. The potential for new projects continues to increase. To provide capacity for the management of this and to explore new avenues of service, the Board has recruited a Projects Officer for a two year trial period. Increasingly, the Board is trying to work with

Circuits local to the projects it supports with the possibility of providing a Pastoral Worker for a group of Circuits with a specific mission to military families. Circuits who wish to look at ways of working closely with military personnel in their area should be in touch with the Board.

6. The Board continues to offer a number of small grants to Chaplains for activities within the Forces communities. One such grant was used to purchase a portable labyrinth for RAF Chaplains from the Church of Scotland and Free Churches and another was used to help a Methodist Chaplain to buy some simple sound equipment to help the leading of worship when on deployment.
7. With the creation of the Armed Forces Corporate and Community covenants, the Board is keen that the Methodist Church takes these as opportunities to express our commitment to our military personnel and their families. Work is ongoing in this area, and more will be reported to the Methodist Council in the year ahead.
8. The Board continues to express to the Conference its thanks for the prayerful support given to all our Chaplains and encourage anyone who would like to know more about Forces Chaplaincy to speak to members of the Board.
9. The Board is grateful for the ongoing diligence and commitment of its Secretary to the ministries of the Chaplains and the Board.
10. Members of the Methodist Forces Board for 2016/17 will be: The Revds David Barrett, Janice Honey-Morgan, Robert L Jones (convener), Jean Quick, Mr Ian Davies, Mr Peter Green, Col Philip Harrison, Miss Shirley Hewitt, Ms Jude Levermore, Mrs Liesel Parkinson, Mr Doug Swanney (Chair), Lt Cdr (ret'd) Matthew Thomas.

Changes to Standing Orders to allow Deacons to serve as Forces Chaplains

11. Each year the Methodist Council appoints a Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force Board ('the Forces Board') through which it exercises general oversight of the work of those who are set apart to serve under the direction of the council as chaplains to the forces.
12. The details of this oversight and eligibility of those able to serve in this way are laid out in Standing Order 1007. Currently, the policy of the Conference restricts eligibility of service as a forces chaplain to presbyters. This is because historically it was thought necessary for a presbyter to be available at all times to preside at Holy Communion and any other tasks that are reserved exclusively for presbyters. The three services (Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force) have continued to assert this position until very recently.
13. However, now the Royal Air Force wishes to affirm and encourage the ministry of Methodist deacons within RAF Chaplaincy and the Royal Army Chaplains Department has also indicated that it may be willing to consider this development in the near future. To facilitate this, the RAF and the Army are requesting that eligibility to serve as forces chaplains should be extended to Methodist deacons under the supervision of the Forces Board.
14. One key factor that supports this proposal is that forces chaplains' work is now often carried out in teams, where a presbyter would be available to preside at communion services, alongside other chaplains offering pastoral and liturgical support to the military service that they serve. The Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order has been consulted on this development and is very supportive of it. Further work will need to be undertaken

on how deacons would be appointed to serve in Forces Chaplaincy, taking into account existing processes for the matching of deacons.

15. This changed policy would need to be reflected in the wording of SO 1007, and the proposed changes are set out below.

1007 The Forces.

(1) [...]

(i) the work of all ~~presbyters~~ **ministers** who are set apart to serve [...]

(ii) the work of all deacons serving in support of chaplains; [...]

(1A) The Forces Board shall also exercise a general oversight of the work of ~~presbyters~~ **ministers** appointed to serve [...]

(3) [...]

(b) Chaplains shall be regarded as ~~presbyters~~ **ministers** in the home work. Deacons serving in support of chaplains shall be similarly regarded. In either case they shall be members of the Synod [...]

(4) Such chaplains, deacons and lay workers are not appointed [...]

*****RESOLUTIONS**

9/1. The Conference received the Report.

9/2. The Conference adopted the policy of permitting deacons to serve as forces chaplains.

9/3. The Conference amended SO 1007 as set out in the Report.