# 25. Reaffirming *Our Calling*: Oversight and Trusteeship

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| **Resolutions** | See end of the Report |

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The 2019 Conference received a report showing a number of developments in reaffirming *Our Calling* (see Agenda item 16 *Developments in Reaffirming Our Calling*). One particular area of importance discussed in the report at paragraph 23 concerns "oversight and trusteeship, considering structures with the aim of providing greater support; enabling ministry, mission and broader strategic thinking; and promoting better coordination." The Council, the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), and the Strategy and Resources Committee have spent considerable time in this connexional year discussing the presenting issues concerning our current methods of oversight and where trusteeship sits within our structure.

1.2 These discussions have clarified the two main aims of this work: firstly, to ensure we can comply and better demonstrate compliance with our obligations as a charity, and, secondly, to ensure appropriate representation and a better model of conferring that enables the Church to fulfil its calling. The latter aim is responding to the clear need to ensure that the Church's structures are such that they release energy to be focused on the mission of the Church (in all its forms).

1.3 In considering this in the light of the Church's ecclesiology and polity, the following five 'in principle' issues were identified:

1. The nature of the oversight in the life of the Church
2. The authority of the Conference and what is delegated
3. The nature of trusteeship and whether different forms of trusteeship can or should be held in different places
4. The nature of representation
5. The nature of the committee structure that enables the Council and the Conference to do their work.

1.4 This paper seeks to set out a way in which the structures of the Church can be adapted to meet the twin aims identified above whilst holding those five 'in principle' issues in a way that is consistent with our polity and ecclesiology. In other words, whatever emerges from this process will authentically witness to who we are (a people called by God to love and praise). The paper explores three areas where change seems to be demanded, if not overdue – the trusteeship of Local Churches, the trusteeship and governance of the Connexion, and the structure and leadership of Districts.

**2. Local church trusteeship**

2.1 The following recommendations are brought in response to the concerns which are often expressed about the lack of volunteers willing and able to take on trusteeship and other roles essential to the functioning of churches and Circuits, alongside the growth in the tasks required of them. The focus for the work has been therefore to remove duplication of effort, alleviate anxiety about the future (particularly in smaller churches) and provide a way forward that enables churches and Circuits to concentrate on their missional task.

It is helpful to be clear what is meant by Trusteeship in this context. Local Church Councils are the Managing Trustees, holding responsibilities that require a number of officers to discharge them. One of the drivers for change is the recognition that whilst a church can be as small as six members, a small church council is left carrying a considerable burden of responsibility for property, finance and legal affairs.

Not to be confused with (though held alongside) managing trusteeship is charity trusteeship, the civic arrangement whereby those who are responsible for the work of a charitable trust are held accountable. Until now, only those churches with an income greater than £100,000 per annum have been required to register with the Charity Commission. Other churches have been excepted from this requirement. But is important to note that at the time of writing it not clear as to whether the 'excepted status' that currently 4000 Churches within the Connexion have under the Charities Act 2011 will be extended beyond the current end date of March 2021.

The 'exception' has been granted by Statutory Instrument 2014 (No. 242). This means that they currently do not need to be registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales (in Scotland all charities need to register). However, in all other ways, these churches are expected to comply with charity law and regulatory requirements. If that status is removed then all these churches will have to comply and register with the Charity Commission which will change the nature of their reporting.

This exception is almost certain to end this year[1]. Whilst registering with and reporting each year to the Charity Commission is not especially onerous, it presents another demand on a small number of people and we need to ask if that is not a needless expense of energy and, often, duplication of work.

2.2 One suggestion that has emerged in this reflection is that the minimum number of members for a Local Church might be raised from six to somewhere between 12 to 25. This would require a change to SO 605(2), and to SO 601(2) which provides a rationale for the very low existing number. Such a change would not preclude a small number of Methodists meeting for worship, maintaining a building, and still having funds available for the maintenance and mission of their cause; in fact, it is hoped that it would better enable that to happen as such small fellowships, liberated from some of the administrative and legal burden they presently carry, would have time and energy to focus more clearly on fulfilling *Our Calling*. In terms of our constitution and practice, the small fellowship would become a class of a larger church, with its assets administered by the larger Church Council, on which the class could (and almost certainly would) have representation.

2.3 Remembering that the Circuit is 'the primary unit…. (SO 500(1))', this change will assist Circuits to coordinate their mission with the minimum number of church governance bodies (including Church Councils) that it needs. In some Circuits, this could result in there being a single trustee body as the Circuit Meeting could also operate as a united Church Council. In other Circuits, a number of Church Councils would be in existence, each responsible for one or more places of worship. The strategic approach to this should, it is suggested, be determined by each Circuit, depending on the geography, history and future mission foci.

This means that it is not only churches with a very small membership that should be challenged about the necessity of having their own trustee body. However, Circuits will want to move towards this point consensually, by inviting churches to explore 'federating' and pooling responsibilities and assets in order that each constituent body is most effectively enabled to meet its missional priorities.

[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/587387/Excepted_charities.pdf
See section 4 - Duration of exceptions

2.5 The work of these (fewer) Trustee bodies would, in many cases, be large and complicated. Within this framework, therefore, the clear intention is to enable Circuits to take on paid staff to manage areas such as finance, property, safeguarding, and support with the management of staff and volunteers. Superintendents must have the appropriate administrative and managerial support which would then free them up to focus on the tasks that they were called into ministry to perform.

2.6 One significant issue, in whatever way ahead is decided, is how to support those churches whose members resist becoming part of something bigger but which are no longer able to function as a church in their own right; for these places there needs to be a mechanism for bringing about change which will support mission. At our heart we are a connexional church and that means we need to be able to direct resources for the greatest impact of the many.

2.8 The reorganisation of trustee responsibilities presents both a challenge and an opportunity better to equip those who are called to serve on Church Councils (or other Trustee bodies) about their responsibilities which, anecdotal evidence from many places suggests, are at present poorly understood.

**3. District Trustees**

3.1 Conversations during the year have indicated that in most places the structure as set out in SO 966(1) is working well for the management of the district affairs. The SO requires for the District Trustees to be annually appointed by the Synod, and to report to the Synod through the District Policy Committee. In many cases, the District Policy Committee acts as the Trustees.

3.2 Since not every District Policy Committee will include representatives from each Circuit in the District, this implies a different understanding of representation from that applied elsewhere in our structures.

3.3 It is therefore suggested that the benefits of this way of working could be replicated in other parts of the Church. In the suggested new model, the Synod would have the relationship with the Conference, and the District Trusts would have the relationship with the new Executive/Trustee.

**4. Trustees | Executive Council**

4.1 In 2006 the Charity Commission advised that the Church should formally register as a charity, and since October 2009 the Methodist Church in Great Britain has been a registered charity under the terms of the Charities Act 2006. (Prior to 2006, it had been an 'excepted charity'.) Given our polity, it was clear at the time that the Conference would have to be the trustee body of the registered charity. This way of working is now felt to be unsuitable for a number of reasons, all of which were detailed in a report commissioned by the SRC and discussed by the Council. The Conference is too large a body to exercise effective trusteeship in the way in which charity trusteeship is now understood. A trustee body would normally be expected to meet more than once each year and to have a close engagement with the work of those who are employed by and exercise operational management of the charity. Much of the detailed work that trustees in another charity would undertake (eg, the scrutiny of accounts) is, within our current ways of working, undertaken by the Council and/or the Strategy and Resources Committee, leaving a lack of clarity about where responsibility really lies. There is also an expectation that the trustee body will comprise those with relevant skills and experience to oversee the work of the charity.

4.2 The SRC has therefore concluded that the Church needs a smaller group (no more than 25 and possibly as few as 12 people), which includes the right skills and experience, to be the trustee body. It is envisaged that the group would include some District Chairs, but that there would be diversity (lay/ordained, gender, ethnic) within the group. Members of the group would be interviewed, inducted and properly trained having met a basic competency threshold to be considered for the body. Trustees would be appointed for a three-year term on a rolling pattern so that there is appropriate continuity. The group would have responsibility for the delivery of strategy as identified through the vision laid out in the Conference, in fulfilment of the charitable objectives, and would report to the Charity Commission and to the Conference. This trustee body will oversee the production of the annual report, the submission of the audited statements and the approval of the budget. It would have overall responsibility within the framework of the delegated trusteeship role from the Conference to ensure the regulatory work is done for finances, safeguarding, data protection, fundraising, property, employment and reports to government and regulatory authorities. All the trustees would be members of the Conference. Embedded within the Conference, it would need to be clear that the trustee body acted on behalf of the Conference and was accountable to the Conference. The trustee body would need to meet around six times per year and would take on the majority of the functions of both the existing Council and the SRC with clear lines of delegation for other matters to existing or newly developed Committees of the Conference.

4.3 One of the repeated questions with which those engaged in this process have needed to grapple has been how to ensure that any trustee body and the committees which serve it and the Conference are both fully competent and properly representative of the Church. It is therefore proposed that a Nominations Committee be established to ensure transparency and diversity across all the connexional committees. The Nominations Committee would be responsible for identifying the skills and experience needed whenever vacancies arose and with nominating suitable persons to the Conference as members of the trustee body and to the Conference and/or trustee body as members of other committees.

4.4 The Trustee Group would see reports from the three major committees (Mission, Ministries and Finance/Resources) and would hold them to account, with the chairs of each committee being members of the Trustee group. By ensuring that each of the Committees had manageable workloads with members forming smaller workgroups with a solutions focused agenda then space for conferring and imaginative thinking could be maintained.

4.5 In the wake of these changes, a number of roles within the life of the Church will need review. For example, in the context of the creation of a new Finance/ Resources Committee it may be an opportune moment to review the need for and role of Treasurers in the Methodist Church at the connexional level.

**5. The Conference**

5.1 The Conference will continue to be the governing body of the Church and the trustee body would work within that framework. In this model, each member of the trustee body would be a member of the Conference, replacing the current category of Conference-Elected representatives. This would ensure that the continuity and experience represented by the Conference-elected representatives is instead expressed through the trustees. The historical link to the 'Legal Hundred' would be continued in this way.

5.2 Membership of the Conference would be examined in the light of a reduction in the number of connexional seats (set out in SO 102) following review in the light of a remodelled committee structure and the district allocations amended as is normal practice to reflect current membership levels.

5.3 This model requires a robust mechanism of conferring to ensure that the trustee body have as full an understanding of the will of the Conference on the theological and strategic matters it considers. The Connexional Leaders' Forum noted there remains a difference between representation, participation and presence in the life of any decision-making body; it is possible to reduce numbers whilst increasing participation and retaining relevant representation. It is imperative that the supremacy of the Conference is understood clearly by all working in the creation of the trustee body. The trustee body is only permitted to act in light of the direction set by the Conference and the absolute assurance that matters relating to the practice and polity of the Church (eg *God in Love Unites Us*) would be the work of the Conference not the trustee body). The trustee body would have at its heart the desire to serve, support and enable the people called Methodist to engage in the calling of the Methodist Church, implementing the decisions of the Conference and, where necessary and within new Standing Orders, acting on behalf of the Conference.

5.4 The work undertaken during the last review of the Conference where the desire to move to being a more diverse body was directly linked to the length, location and way of working of the Conference has not been brought to fruition but the main points of that work remain critical for the future.

5.5 It is further desired that the Conference weekend is clearly seen as a celebration event and the focus for our connexional year, promoted as being open to all and something which gathers Methodists together. This would hopefully bridge the gap that is felt to exist between many members of the Church and the Conference itself. It would be desirable for consideration to be given as to how all can be supported to attend such an event rather than only those who can afford the financial outlay.

5.6 Alongside the three committees relating to the trustee body, a number of other committees will remain essential to the effective oversight of the Connexion. These will include such bodies as the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee. Further reflection is needed on the role of other bodies (eg, the Stationing Committee in the light of the review of the Ministries Committee).

**6. Districts**

6.1 Part of the review has been the size and functioning of the Districts. The current configuration has changed little since 2006 whilst the size of the Church's membership has reduced considerably. The fact of decline has resulted in a number of areas where some Districts are no longer functioning in the way that they did (eg some have neither probationers nor candidates in a year) whilst in many ways the expectations on Chairs and District Officers have increased.

In order to explore how we might best adapt to the current situation, the SRC proposes that Districts work together within the stationing regions (or others that emerge in the process), to create the 'regional district groups'. The first aim of these groups is to increase the capacity for cross-District working on the standing processes of the Church (eg candidating, probationers, stationing) in order to reduce the amount of time and personnel involved in these processes and free more people up for other tasks or address the lack of available volunteers in most places.

The 'regional district groups' will also be a place where consideration can be given to the best way for that region to evolve in the future. These conversations will keep at their forefront the purpose of the District and how the required roles that the Chairs are asked to fulfil (in

leadership in mission and strategy and in oversight, governance and supervision) are best discharged. Synod Secretaries and lay leaders will be critical in driving these conversations.

For many the future of the District they are in is clear; it has an identifiable mission purpose and can staff the various functions it has to fulfil. For others there is a desire to look at different ways of serving the Circuits which may include changes to district boundaries, sizes and the types of appointments it wants in leadership. All should be encouraged to pray and reflect on what best enables a geographic collection of Circuits to be together in mission.

Both the Secretary of the Conference and the Connexional Secretary have begun conversations with groups of Chairs about the best way the mission of the Church can be served in their region. During 2020/2021 those conversations will be extended to draw in district officers and key lay people with the purpose of mapping a future of each District in dialogue with its neighbours.

6.2 One of the questions that arises through this is how the right presbyters can be identified to share the leadership of Connexion and District as Chair. It is proposed that (in conjunction with the Evangelism and Growth Strategy) there be a connexional vocational discernment process, to identify those who would be suitable to be Chairs and/or to hold other significant leadership roles in the life of the Connexion. This may involve 6 months' shadowing and training, before inclusion on a connexional list from which nominations panels will make their decision. This will necessitate a review of the size and function of the current Chairs' nomination panel.

**Summary**

The following is a summary of the bodies that would make up the oversight/trustee structure of the Methodist Church in Britain from 2021.

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| **Conference** | Is the supreme authority for the church on all matters of doctrine, faith and order.<br><br>*This should consist of representatives and ex officio members.* | • Determines all matters of Doctrine.<br>• Elects the Presidency.<br>• Appoints the trustees for the Connexional Council/trustee body.<br>• Delegates all matters of trusteeship within the church to specific bodies, most notably the connexional Council/trustee body.<br>• Establishes the framework within which the trustee body must work.<br>• Receives ministers into full connexion.<br>• Stations ministers.<br>• Receives reports from and celebrates the life of connexional bodies<br>• Holds to account and celebrates the mission of each District |
| **Connexional Council/trustee body** | Is the charity trustee body for the Methodist Church in Great Britain. | • Works within the framework directed by the Conference.<br>• Directs employees, money and property as the resources for mission. |
| **District Synods** | The representative body for the Circuits to confer with each other. | • Responsibilities largely as now but delegating most trustee responsibilities to the District Council<br>• Appoints the District Council |

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| | | • Discerns matters of faith and order as required by the Conference or through memorials to the Conference. |
| **District Councils** | The trustee body for matters devolved from the Conference that have implications wider than a Circuit. | • Responsibilities largely as the present District Policy Committee plus the trustee duties of the Synod |
| **Circuit Meeting** | Representative body for local churches and trustee body for:<br>• Matters devolved from the Conference; and<br>• Might also operate as a church council. | • Responsibilities largely as now but probably acting as managing trustees for more local churches than at present |
| **Church Council** | The trustee body for a church or number of societies meeting in different places. | • Responsibilities largely as now |

**7. Process and timeline**

The resolutions in this report set in train significant work which will need to be undertaken over the year ahead for sufficiently detailed proposals to be presented to the 2021 Conference to make the necessary delegations to bring these changes into effect.

The following timeline is proposed:

September to December 2020 – Law and Polity Committee considers changes to CPD to report to Methodist Council in January 2021.
September 2020 – CLF asked for its input on Terms of Reference of all newly proposed bodies
November 2020 – SRC produces draft Terms of Reference
January 2021 – Methodist Council asked for comment on draft Terms of Reference
April 2021 – Methodist Council approves draft Terms of Reference

Conference 2021 – Approves Terms of Reference for newly proposed bodies. Approves Terms of Reference and personnel for Nominations Committee

September 2021 – August 2022 – Methodist Council, CLF and SRC complete final year of business. Nominations Committee fills appointments for trustee body and new committees to start September 2022, bringing recommendations to Methodist Council in April 2022.

September 2022 – New model begins.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

**25/0. The Conference received the Report and invited comments on it from around the Connexion.**

**25/1. The Conference welcomed and affirmed the ethos and direction of the Report's section on local church trusteeship, and supports the suggestion that raising the minimum size for a Local Church will assist Circuits to coordinate their mission. The Conference, therefore, directeed the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to ensure that a review of Standing Order 605 (1) and (2) takes place and that a proposal is brought to the 2021 Conference to raise the minimum size for a Local Church, together with examples of creative ways in which one Church on multiple sites and/or federations**

**of classes under a united Church Council can enable local missional communities to flourish. In the light of this, and to maximise the potential fruitfulness of all Circuits' use of their resources, the Conference further directed all Circuit Meetings to review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and encourages Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling.**

**25/1a. The Conference directed Circuit Meetings and Church Councils to undertake Unconscious Bias related training in order to ensure equality and diversity within the appointments process of the new trustee bodies.**

**25/2. The Conference referred to the Law and Polity Committee Section 4 of the report and directed the Committee to report to the 2021 Conference on the legal and constitutional issues that the proposal to create a smaller trustee body raises.**

**25/3. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a review of the size of the Conference as required under SO 100(2) and to report with recommendations for any changes to the 2021 Conference.**

**25/4. The Conference directed the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to review the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.**

**25/5. The Conference directed the Ministries Committee to bring proposals for a discernment process for senior posts, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.**

**25/6. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that each District reviews its mission plan, committee structure and ways of working and considers its findings alongside other Districts in a regional grouping.**

**25/6a. The Conference directed that within the process of reviewing mission plans, committee structures and ways of working at District Level, equality and diversity will be taken into consideration, and that any persons responsible for appointing new members to those committees will undertake Unconscious Bias related training.**

**25/7. The Conference directed the Council to appoint a task group to receive reports from regional groups and to report to the 2021 Conference with proposals for change from 2022 onwards.**

**25/8. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to consider the report and to report to the 2021 Conference on the faith and order issues that the proposals raise.**

**25/9. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a small group to have oversight of the work on structures of oversight and trusteeship to ensure that there is collaborative working, further consultation as necessary and that concerns already identified and comments received after the Conference are addressed, and in order to ensure that the proposals brought to the 2021 Conference are cohesive and comprehensive.**

*It is proposed that the small group comprises the Secretary of the Conference, the Connexional Secretary, the chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, a representative of the Faith and Order Committee, a representative of the concerns of equality diversity and inclusion, a representative of the Law and Polity Committee, a District Chair, a Superintendent, a lay Synod Secretary and a circuit steward.*

**Appendix: Models of Governance in other Churches in the United Kingdom.**

| URC | Baptist Union | Church of Scotland* |
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| **General Assembly**<br>Size: Approx 250 people<br>Mostly nominated from within Synods, some ex-officio.<br><br>Role: Meets annually to celebrate, discuss, and make decisions on the life and work of the denomination. Shapes the strategy (whereas the Trust stewards resources to effect that strategy). | **Assembly**<br>Size: Over 800. Gathering of Officers of BUGB, BUGB senior staff, covenanted churches, Associations, Colleges and Ministers.<br><br>Role: The Assembly includes celebration, inspiration, reflection and deliberation. It is the place where churches are directly represented through their delegates, alongside ministers and members of Council.<br>Responsibilities:<br>• Specific Decision making – appointment of General Secretary and Treasurer and changes to the Constitution.<br>• Discernment. | **General Assembly**<br>Size: Around 730 ministers, deacons and elders are commissioned to attend the Assembly each year. Delegates and visitors are also invited from partner churches around the world.<br><br>Role: The General Assembly is the supreme court of the Church of Scotland. The Assembly meets annually to hear reports from the councils and committees, make laws and set the agenda for the national Church. |
| **Mission Council**<br>Size: 75-80 people, two-thirds come from Synods.<br><br>Role: Mission Council is the executive body of the General Assembly, and meets twice a year. The purpose is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and the policy of the Church, to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the community. | **Council**<br>Size: 84 people<br><br>Role: Engages in further discernment so that a broader strategic direction as Baptists Together can be agreed and owned. Churches are represented through their Associations. The leadership and oversight of all partners in Baptists Together is discerned and held accountable by Council.<br>Responsibilities:<br>• Strategy<br>• Decision Making<br>• Reflection<br>• Discernment | **Councils**<br>Role: The Church of Scotland's day-to-day policy making and practical decision making at local, national and international level are organised into councils and a number of associated committees and departments. There are currently 5 main Councils but re-structuring report recommends they be reduced to two:<br>1) An inward facing body responsible for resourcing of ministries, upbringing of the congregations of the Church of Scotland and the envisioning of Christian mission in Scotland.<br>2) An outward facing body that will facilitate the overseas work of the Church of Scotland together with the tasks of bearing Christian social witness at home and overseas. |
| **Trust**<br>Size: Approx 20 people, mostly elected by General Assembly, some ex-officio. Seek expertise in management, property, HR, law or finance.<br><br>Role: Acts as stewards of the assets and resources so they are deployed according to decisions and policies | **Trustee Board**<br>Size: 12 people<br>3 ex-officio, 9 others elected by Council<br><br>Role:<br>Review actions taken by BSG to fulfil the broad strategic direction set by trustees and Council, and that Council | **Assembly Trustees**<br>Size: 12 members<br>Comprise people with skills in law, HR, finance, management, communications and theology, and members with extensive experience of leadership in the Church of Scotland. Some ex-officio to coordinate with work of General Assembly and General Trustees. |

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| and strategy of the General Assembly. No direct accountability to General Assembly but strong sense of partnership.<br>Responsible for:<br>• Compliance with the law<br>• Solvency (budget)<br>• Prudence (not exposing the church to unnecessary risk)<br>• Purpose - ensure church uses resources for what it should be doing (charitable purposes) | and BSG together remain accountable to the churches, and true to governing documents.<br>Ensure that BUBG as a charity remains financially sound as a going concern, manages risk, meets the requirement of the law and regulatory bodies and meets high standards as an employer.<br>Responsibilities:<br>• Ensure processes in place to identify key issues<br>• Instruct BSG to act within costed timescales<br>• Ensure BSG implement Council decisions, guidance and wishes<br>• Appoint a Baptist Steering Group to exercise leadership and managed the implementation of agreed strategies and policies. | Responsibilities:<br>Exercise broad oversight of the charitable body.<br>Monitor, evaluate, coordinate the work of the Agencies and Councils and their use of resources.<br>Facilitate a rolling budgetary programme, have oversight of all potential reports and resolutions (to enable General Assembly to be able to set priorities upon the basis of systematically presented set of options). |
| Charitable Company | Charitable Incorporated Association | Unincorporated Association |

*Church of Scotland model is based on what was proposed in their recent review which is due to be implemented in 2020.