

11. Methodist Forces Board

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1. Methodist Forces Chaplains continue to minister to the women and men of His Majesty's forces throughout the UK and around the world. This is a significant and enduring ministry for which the Methodist Church is held in high regard, due to the calibre of its chaplains. Further evidence of this good standing came in the King's New Year's Honours List when the Revd Dr Gary Watt received a commendation from the Chief of the General Staff for his 'outstanding work' in chaplaincy.
2. In light of concerns related to wider international issues, the Forces Board is considering what it could do to allow the Methodist Church to respond to a request from the military to provide additional chaplains at short notice, should the situation require it.

Activity

3. At the start of October 2023, the President of the Conference enjoyed a visit to the British Army on Salisbury Plain. This visit gave the President a good insight into the workings of the army, and helpfully an opportunity to see chaplains in their own context. This included accompanying chaplains on a visit to regular and reservist soldiers on a large exercise on the plain, and a memorable reception by the Fijian Fellowship in Tidworth Garrison. Each year this visit is timed to give the President a better understanding of the military prior to representing the Methodist Church at the National Act of Remembrance.
4. In time for Remembrance 2023, the Methodist Forces Board (MFB) published a revised set of resources to support church leaders with Remembrance Sunday services. A number of chaplains spoke to video about their perspective on Remembrance; these have been extremely well received by churches and it was heartening for the Board and Chaplains to see these so well used.
5. During the Tri-Service Chaplains' Conference at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre in February 2024, the chaplains received an update on matters affecting the Connexion, and were able to engage in discussions regarding a Methodist Way of Life and becoming A Justice Seeking Church. The presence of the Secretary of the Conference in the company was most appreciated. The chaplains said a fond farewell to the Revd Tim Wilkinson. Tim has given long and distinguished service to the Royal Navy.

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6. It remains a priority for the Board to identify and support those with a potential calling to Armed Forces chaplaincy. Enquiries are relatively infrequent at this stage. The Board remains keen to work with colleagues who may wish to learn more about this dynamic ministry.
7. At the request of senior commanders, and in order to support the roll out of Non-Religious Pastoral Officers to military chaplaincy, requirements for those who wish to join as Armed Forces chaplains have recently been clarified and strengthened. The Board has made good links with key figures in Humanists UK, the Endorsing Authority for future humanist chaplains to the military, in order to provide the best possible pastoral support for HM Forces personnel.
8. Forces chaplains were present at 3Generate, the Methodist children and youth assembly. Their presence and ministry was appreciated, and plans are being made for forces chaplains to be present at 3Generate 2024.
9. The Armed Forces route to achieve Worship: Leading and Preaching status continues to have good engagement. Staff Sergeant Joe Navoka was the first person to complete the Armed Forces route to become a local preacher. The Chaplain General attended Joe's service of recognition. The publicity from this achievement has been helpful in generating further interest in the scheme. The Board is extremely grateful to Cdr Mark Barton for continuing to oversee this work.
10. The Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) continues to support the Hants-Surrey Border Circuit with its work in Aldershot Garrison and has now commenced funding one further Circuit to undertake work with the RAF.
11. The role of Secretary to the Forces Board (SFB) was advertised during the year and the outcome of that is reported elsewhere in the Agenda. Since September 2023, the Revd Dr Andrew Wood has been able to give some pastoral support to chaplains, acting as the interim SFB. We have also been well served by the Chair of the Southampton District in supporting the Chaplains and we wish him well as he moves on to a new station. We have already welcomed the incoming Chair of the Southampton District to two of our meetings to enable a handover to take place. The chaplains deeply appreciate the support that they receive from the Connexion.
12. The role of Chair of the Forces Board has also been advertised. After 16 enjoyable years and one aborted attempt to move on, the Board look forward to a new Chair and a new Secretary coming in to lead this work. Alongside this transition,

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the Board will welcome the Assistant Secretary of the Conference (ASC) to their number as the ASC takes a lead from within the Secretariat for supporting this important ministry.

Future plans

13. Partnership working between the MFB and the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) has made good progress in moving towards the release of significant resources to those Districts and Circuits who wish to engage (further) with the Armed Forces community. Colleagues are requested to be proactive in registering an interest to access these resources by emailing SFB@methodistchurch.org.uk

Cadet Force chaplaincy

14. Cadet Force chaplains have expressed their thanks for the continued opportunities to engage with each other, facilitated by the Board. This allows them to support and encourage one another as they embark on a significant ministry; when taken together the Cadet Forces make up the largest youth organisation in the country.

Note of thanks

15. As with many areas of Church life, this last year has been one of change and transition. The Board has been expertly well served by its Development Officer, Phil Maltby, and we owe him our thanks for all that he has stepped into on our behalf.
16. As ever, the work of the MFB is capably assisted and financially supported by the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust. The Board's thanks goes to the Trust for its enduring support to maintain a strong Methodist presence in the military, ministering to serving personnel and their families, civil servants, and contractors, to the glory of God.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 11/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**