

30. Stationing Committee

Contact name and details	Ms Jenny Jackson, Chair of the Stationing Committee chairstationing@methodistchurch.org.uk
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In my first report to the Conference as Chair of the Stationing Committee, I start by describing the overall work which is further explored in the sections that follow. It reflects the breadth of work and the commitment of Local Churches, Circuits and Districts. Throughout the year, many people work together with their representatives on the Stationing Committee, and members of the Connexional Team, to honour the commitment to send ministers - not simply to where they might wish to go, but to where they are needed most.
- 1.2 The work reflected in what follows represents hours of dedication – and I begin by expressing the enormous thanks to the many people who, behind the scenes and therefore often ‘unsung’, work tirelessly supporting the vital task of matching presbyters and deacons, to appointments where they can live out their calling as they offer their personal gifts and talents to Circuits, on behalf of the Conference.
- 1.3 Standing Order 780 sets out the various categories of stationing. Broadly, stationing matching is the process through which Conference ensures that Circuits receive ministers - presbyteral and diaconal – who are matched to appointments across the Connexion. The process is carried out by and demonstrates a model of partnership working between lay and ordained people in churches and Circuits, with appointed lay and ordained colleagues in each District. Each aspect of the work is overseen by the connexional Stationing Committee, and the work of stationing begins with student ministers and others, entering their first appointments in British Methodism. In the absence of a Chair of District, the district Lay Stationing Representative (LSR) always acts as deputy, and is present at every stage of the process locally, thus affirming the importance of this partnership. Each District has one district LSR, although as some Districts become larger, it could be appropriate to explore nominating an assistant LSR. However, the appointed district LSR will always deputise in the absence of the Chair of District.
- 1.4 The Stationing Committee constantly faces challenges and in the last eight months we have reviewed in depth a number of key issues beginning with the assumptions around stationing in our current age.

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- 1.5 The journey into ordained ministry of course begins long before a student enter theological college and is influenced by, and impacts on the lives of those who support them as they takes early steps towards ordination. Many children in 'manse households', like their parents, have lived through the impact of the pandemic and this cannot be overstated. We also recognise that as our population in Britain ages, ministers face additional social responsibilities.
- 1.6 As minister's partners seek to fulfil their own service and calling through vital work, wherever possible, we take account of these as we match ministers to appointments. Increasingly too, the elderly parents who supported their daughters and sons at the outset of their travels, now have greater and more challenging needs to consider. We salute the commitment of all those impacted by our decisions as we seek to send ministers to where they can flourish whilst serving the areas and places in greatest need.
- 1.7 Before the work even begins, Stationing Committee reviews and (where necessary) recommends amendments to the stationing Code of Practice. The Code of Practice seeks to honour decisions taken by the Conference to amend Standing Orders, and some change is inevitable year on year. The Connexion is indebted to the work undertaken this year by Sue Walters, LSR in the Northampton District, who on behalf of the committee, has incorporated these changes with care and endeavoured to ensure that we stay on track with competing requirements as they emerge.
- 1.8 The Stationing Committee has also recognised the impact of legislative changes in mainland Britain on ministers from other jurisdictions (within the Connexion) as well as those seeking to serve in Britain from other Conferences and Churches. Moving between jurisdictions within one connexional church can present a difficult challenge.
- 1.9 The Stationing Committee is very grateful to the Revd Jenny Impey, who has guided the Stationing Matching Group, to the Revd Dr Stephen Lindridge, who chairs the work of the Stationing Action Group, to Deacon Karen McBride and the Revd Dr David Hinchliffe, responsible for guiding the work of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee, and to the Revd Dr Claire Potter, Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries, for all the prayerful work they undertake throughout the year as they support the 'stationing' of ministers.

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- 1.10 Discussion at the conclusion of the third Stationing Matching Group meeting recognised that because Circuits and Districts now routinely review their stationing requirements, all circuit appointments accepted for inclusion in the stationing process require equal priority in the stationing matching process. Every effort is made to match the needs of a circuit appointment with an available minister. To this end, the previous categorisation of labelling some appointments as more 'critical' than others is less relevant and this was discussed at a Stationing Committee meeting this year. As Districts already determine the 'order of call' when they seek to match appointments, the 'critical' designation has now been discontinued. (Of note, this terminology was introduced some years ago to meet a specific need.)
- 1.11 We recognise that across the Connexion, ordained ministry 'feels' thinly spread. This is due to a variety of factors, and in June 2024, the Stationing Committee will explore the reasons for this, and the wisdom and appropriateness of an increasing number of permissions granted to ordained ministers to serve outside of circuit ministry. Presently, 38 ministers have permission to be without appointment and 74 to be in an appointment outside the control of the Church. The reasons for this are varied and this work will continue into the next connexional year.
- 1.12 Alongside this there has been a small increase in the number of candidates for ministry offering for training with limited deployability – again for many reasons. The reasons inevitably impact on the perception of 'shortage' of ministers, and I anticipate returning to this in my report to Conference in 2025.

2. Stationing Matching Group

- 2.1 Stationing matching is a process in which we are attempting to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Circuits and presbyters. This year the group was able to meet in person for the first two rounds which enhanced that sense of the whole Connexion being present in one place, with each minister and Circuit known. The work was, as always, conducted carefully and prayerfully with time being taken to consider each presbyter and Circuit as the group sought to make matches which would enable presbyters and Circuits to flourish in mission and ministry and ensure ministry was spread across the Connexion in response to the greatest need.
- 2.2 There was widespread awareness at the beginning of the matching process that the gifts, skills, experience and aspirations together with the

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limitations on deployability would mean that many critical appointments and superintendencies would not be filled by the end of the process and that resources were stretched to the limit already in many places. As a Connexion we need to keep on grasping the issues of what work will not be done, which profiles will not be matched and how presbyters and Circuits can flourish and be equipped to engage in the current context but those things will not be addressed by the stationing processes alone. It may be that more awareness of the Methodist Council report on flexible patterns of working (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/flexible-working-for-ministers/>) and greater willingness on the part of Circuits to recognise the possibility of spreading the 12 sessions across the week in more flexible ways might enable some presbyters to be more widely deployable and still be able to be responsive to their family and other needs.

SMG 1

- 2.3 By the beginning of the matching process, 104 circuit profiles and 73 presbyteral profiles had been submitted. As the process continued, a further three circuit profiles and two presbyteral profiles were submitted. Requests were received for 38 appointments to be designated as critical and following scrutiny, 17 were accepted as critical appointments. Reasoned statements were sought for 16 other appointments which appeared to be less challenging than those that could be accepted for initial stationing for ministers of other Conferences and Churches (MOCCs) and which, therefore, needed to be tested against these criteria. Of these, some were reshaped, two were withdrawn and four were reshaped as part time appointments. Twelve of the profiles were for part time appointments of which one offered no manse.
- 2.4 During the first meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG 1), at the beginning of November, there were 104 Circuits seeking presbyters and 68 presbyters available for matching. All 68 presbyteral matches were made, including for all of the critical appointments. Visits resulted in 51 invitations being issued and accepted of the 68 matches made. Of the 17 that were declined, 13 were declined by the presbyter and two by the Circuit, and a further two by both. Overall 75% of the visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. One presbyter did not visit.
- 2.5 Out of the 17 critical appointments matched, nine were accepted, six declined by the presbyter, one by the Circuit and one by both. One visit did not take place. This meant that 82% of non-critical appointment matches were accepted against 53% of matches to critical appointments.

Figures

	Total	Agreed	Dec Presbyter	Circuit Dec	Decline	No visit P Dec	% agreed
<i>Total matches</i>	68	51	12	2	2	1	75%
<i>Non critical</i>	51	42	7	1	1	0	82%
<i>Critical</i>	17	9	5	1	1	1	53%
<i>Double match</i>	36	29	6	1	0	0	80%
<i>Identified presbyter</i>	18	15	1	1	1	0	83%
<i>Identified circuit</i>	3	2			1		66%
<i>Identified neither</i>	11	5	5			1	45%

2.6 From the figures, the matching group appears to give priority to those matches identified by the presbyter or both. Whether or not the presbyter identified it also seems to influence greatly whether a match is agreed. Although seven out of the 14 of the matches where the presbyter had not identified the Circuit did stick, it is worthy of comment that seven out of the 54 Circuits where the presbyter had identified the Circuit were subsequently declined by the presbyter and that seven out of the 36 double matches were declined.

SMG 2

2.7 At the beginning of December, the SMG met at the King's Park Conference Centre, Northampton. There were 52 circuit profiles to be considered (of which eight were critical) and only 17 presbyters available for matching. A further two appointments were not available for consideration because of incomplete curtailments. Seventeen matches were made, including matches for two of the critical appointments. Eleven matches were agreed but three were declined by the presbyter, one by the Circuit and one by both. No visit was made to one further appointment. Overall, 65% of the visits resulted in accepted invitations.

SMG 3

2.8 The third meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG 3) was held online in January. At that stage there were 43 Circuits (among them five appointments

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designated as critical) seeking presbyters and only nine presbyters available. Matches were found for eight of the presbyters and a further match was made to a critical appointment with a presbyter who was not expecting to be in stationing. Six of the visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Two matches were declined by the presbyters and one by the Circuit. This left 40 appointments unmatched at the end of SMG3, including five critical appointments and 18 Superintendencies.

- 2.9 The Stationing Matching Group is grateful for the engagement of presbyters and Circuits in exploring the matches, all those who prepared profiles, drew up lists to indicate the kinds of presbyters and Circuits they could see themselves working with and flourishing in, prepared for visits and travelled out of their comfort zones to prayerfully engage in discernment conversations. The final recommendations to the Conference come not from the group but from the presbyters and Circuits who say yes to one another and begin the journey of discovering gifts and opportunities for mission and who will commit themselves at welcome services to “join together in the work to which God has called us” (MWB, p. 361).

3. Report of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee

3.1 Scrutiny

- Twenty-two profiles for **presbyteral probationer appointments** were submitted by Circuits;
- Two were withdrawn after the first scrutiny process;
- Three were not approved by the scrutiny group;
- Seventeen were approved. All of these were for full time appointments but one later was reshaped into a part time appointment;
- Eight profiles for Ministers of Other Conferences and Churches (**MOCC appointments**) were submitted by Circuits;
- Two were withdrawn after the first scrutiny process;
- Six were approved. All of these were for full time appointment;
- In January a further appointment was submitted and approved (part time), in the same Circuit as one of the full time appointments;
- For all of the approved appointments, a satisfactory district manse report was received and checked, a Chair’s reference for the Minister in Oversight and the Supervisor was received and checked, and, where necessary, an ecumenical agreement and reasoned statements were received and checked.

3.2 Stationing – Presbyteral Probationers

- Fifteen presbyteral probationers were in initial stationing;

- Three of these had candidated under limited deployability;
- Another one needed a part time appointment;
- Another is married to a probationer who is in a circuit appointment;
- A further five had another form of restriction;
- All 15 were matched at ISSC1 in January;
- All of the matches were confirmed though there were some where the students and Circuits needed to navigate some challenges;
- Two profiles were unmatched.

3.3 Stationing – Diaconal Probationers

- One diaconal probationer was in stationing;
- There were several diaconal appointment profiles which could have been suitable for a probationer. A match was made at Diaconal Stationing in January which was confirmed;
- The Chair's reference for Minister in Oversight and Supervisor and the district manse report were provided to the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers' Oversight Committee.

3.4 Stationing – Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences

- Four MOCCs were recommended (or conditionally recommended) through the transfer panels in November, one to become Recognised and Regarded and three to transfer into Full Connexion.
- Two of these subsequently met with the Stationing Advisory Committee and both were given permission to serve in an appointment outside the control of the church.
- One MOCC met the Changing Status panels in October and was recommended to transfer into Full Connexion.
- Two MOCCs were nominated by their home churches to become Fellowship Group chaplains / coordinators, alongside a part time circuit role. They went through a reduced transfer process in late November and were both recommended to become Recognised and Regarded (RR).
- At ISSC2 on 8 February, three ministers were matched with appointments (two RR and one Full Connexion). One of these was to a part time appointment in circuit and part time to a profile for a fellowship group chaplain / coordinator.
- As SAG2 on 26 February, one MOCC was matched to a full time appointment.
- At 1 March 2024, there remain two appointments unfilled and one MOCC minister unmatched. The delay has been related to the need for a part time appointment and funding for the fellowship group chaplain / coordinator role.

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These aspects are being resolved and it is hoped that a match will be made at SAG3.

- The four matches that have been made have all been confirmed.

3.5 Induction

- An induction day in person was held for two members of each Circuit Leadership Team for Circuits who will be receiving probationers, in Nottingham on 28 February. Twelve of the sixteen Circuits were represented. It was a helpful day of sharing information and good practice. The leadership team included two recent ordinands, a superintendent and a circuit steward who have wide experience of welcoming probationers, the Queen's Foundation Director for Continuing Ministerial Development and the Ministerial Coordinator in the Connexional Team.
- Further meetings will be held later in the summer at the Queen's Foundation between Ministers in Oversight, superintendents and probationers.
- An induction day on Zoom was held on 13 March for two members of each Circuit Leadership Team for Circuits who will be receiving MOCCs. This is being led by two superintendents who have welcomed MOCCs recently, and themselves were both MOCCs, a circuit steward who has welcomed a MOCC, a recently arrived MOCC, and a District Safeguarding Officer.
- The MOCCs themselves will engage with induction events at various points throughout their first year. The MOCC handbook has been updated and has been provided for all of them. It can also be found on the Methodist Church website here: handbook-for-moccs-and-circuits-2024-2025-complete.pdf (d1yuutt686hf0.cloudfront.net).

4. Report of the Stationing Action Group

- 4.1 The Stationing Action Group (SAG) commenced its work on 29 January 2024 and will continue through to the Conference. At the beginning of the process, there were 40 available appointments (of which five had been identified as 'critical'). Nine presbyters (not all of whom have been available to be matched for a variety of reasons) had still to agree an appointment.
- 4.2 Since then, 16 presbyters and four new appointments have been considered by SAG.
- 4.3 In January, four matches were made which led to invitations being accepted by four presbyters, one of which was for the critical appointment. In February,

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six presbyteral matches were made which led to four invitations to serve being accepted. In March, four matches were made, two of which were for critical appointments. One critical appointment remains unfilled. However, two SAG meetings in April and May, are still to come.

- 4.4 Following submission of a reasoned statement, 13 requests were made to withdraw circuit profiles, at the end of March, one of which was for a critical appointment.
- 4.5 The actions reported mean that at Easter 2024 there remain nineteen available appointments, eight of which are superintendentcies. At the time of writing, there are five presbyters who have not yet been successfully matched with an appointment.

5. Report of Diaconal Stationing

- 5.1 The diaconal stationing process began with nine ordained deacons and one diaconal probationer and 12 circuit profiles. During the matching process, one further ordained deacon entered the stationing process and three further circuit profiles were received.
- 5.2 Despite the numbers of circuit profiles being generous, and all deacons in the matching process upholding and committing to the discipline of direct stationing and itinerancy, the matching process was multifaceted. This was because three ordained deacons in the process are part of a clergy couple where the partner is in a (continuing) station, and other deacons are living with significant pastoral and personal responsibilities.
- 5.3 The Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee working with the Warden took extreme care to seek to understand and honour both the hopes and needs of all those in matching process whether a deacon or a Circuit and sought to make the matters which through prayer they discerned would best enable the Church to join in with the service of God to world.
- 5.4 All circuit and deacons profiles were carefully scrutinised, with 'in person' visits by the Warden to Circuits continuing to be an essential part of the diaconal direct stationing process. In November, the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee (DSSC) met in person with the ordained deacons and those to be stationed as probationers and their households, for stationing conversations.

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- 5.5 The current Deputy Warden was one of the ordained deacons in the stationing process and it had been previously agreed that she would be matched at the beginning of the process to allow her to fulfil her duties in the matching of others.
- 5.6 In January, the DSSC matched eight ordained deacons and one diaconal probationers to nine of the remaining 11 circuit profiles. Two ordained deacons who are part of clergy couples were not matched. The matches were called at SMG3. At the end of January, all these matches were confirmed.
- 5.7 Following on from DSSC 2/SMG 3, the DSSC has continued to work in collaboration with the Stationing Action Group, with Circuits and with members of the Order. This ongoing work includes: two Circuits being able to offer appropriate diaconal appointments for the two deacons not matched in January, another ordained deacon entering stationing and being matched to one of the Circuits without a match in January, and a further circuit profile being received. At the time of writing, two circuit profiles remain unfilled and the prayerful work of discernment is continuing between these Circuits and DSSC.
- 5.8 The DSSC recognises and appreciates that its work has been enabled by the willingness of Circuits to discern diaconal appointments. In addition, the DSSC is thankful for the faithfulness of deacons and their households in living out of the diaconal principles of itinerancy and direct stationing and their generosity in embracing the invitations and opportunities these bring to join in with the work of God in the world.
- 5.9 The Warden has had the privilege of being able to journey with and be a part of the Stationing Review Group. Much of the group's work and recommendations focus around the presbyteral matching/stationing process. Therefore, there will be no significant change to the diaconal matching/stationing process; as the Conference in 2019 continued to uphold the need for a commitment to the discipline of direct stationing and itinerancy for deacons and all candidates for ordained diaconal ministry. However, the Stationing Review Group expresses its gratitude to the members of the MDO who have engaged with and prayed for their work.

6. Stationing Code of Practice

- 6.1 Amendments have been made to the Stationing Code of Practice which reflect changes in Standing Orders and other matters which the Stationing Committee wish to emphasise in the light of experience from year to year. This year, more clarity has been given to the requirements for entering stationing and also the section on Visits has been amended to ensure that all those in the process understand the purpose of the visit and how it is to be conducted.

7. Projections

7.1 Number of Methodist presbyters and probationers in the active work

Connexional Year	Actual 2020/2021	Actual 2021/2022	Actual 2022/2023	Estimate 2023/2024	Estimate 2024/2025
Start of Year	1308	1228	1167	1122	1072
Normal Retirements	80	74	65	60	60
Early Retirements	4	7	4	5	5
Resignations	13	7	6	5	5
Other Losses	1	2	1	1	1
TOTAL LOSSES	98	90	76	71	71
New Probationers	13	23	21	16	20
Other Gains	5	6	11	5	5
TOTAL GAINS	18	29	31	21	25
END OF YEAR	1228	1167	1122	1072	1026

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7.2 Number of Methodist deacons and probationers in the active work

Connexional Year	Actual 2020/2021	Actual 2021/2022	Actual 2022/2023	Estimate 2023/2024	Estimate 2024/2025
Start of Year	135	134	139	132	126
Retirements	5	3	11	8	5
Resignations	1	0	0	0	0
Other Losses	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL LOSSES	6	3	11	5	5
New Probationers	5	7	4	2	5
Other Gains	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL GAINS	5	8	4	2	5
END OF YEAR	134	139	132	126	126

8. Stationing Review Group (SRG) Update

8.1 The Stationing Review Group's work continues and, following consultations with the Ministries Committee, the Chairs' Meeting and the Methodist Council, a number of recommendations will be offered to the Church for wider consultation, with a final report to come to the Conference of 2025. The Presbyteral Session of this year's Conference will have the opportunity to consider the current proposals being offered by the SRG.

9. Going Forward

9.1 In conclusion, the Stationing Committee recognises with appreciation the efforts of Circuits and Districts who regularly review ministry requirements, and where appropriate, consider the reconfiguration of appointments, the employment of lay workers, accommodation of alternative expressions of ministry and a recognition of the importance of responding to the request for flexible working patterns, as they discern a way forward in their vision to inspire mission and ministry in their local areas.

9.2 The Stationing Committee membership is by its nature 'fluid'. In broad terms, one Chair of District and one Lay Stationing Representative represent their wider (regional) geographical areas in on behalf of the local lay and ordained

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colleagues. Members of the Stationing Committee, work closely with connexional colleagues, to ensure that the Stationing Committee maintains oversight and responsibility for all matters related to stationing.

- 9.3 We express our thanks therefore to members of each committee and group, recognising the years of service offered by those some of whom this year, hand over with care the baton of their responsibility to new colleagues. Our committee meetings, many of which are now held using Zoom, receive a vast amount of paperwork reflecting the work, which generates guidance and advice to those on the ground carrying different responsibilities. The committee is committed to work in partnership – as lay (generally unpaid) and ordained members - together.
- 9.4 It goes without saying that the Stationing Committee is indebted to ordained ministers who, as they minister alongside churches and Circuits, constantly develop new personal gifts and skills, and share these with lay colleagues, again in the local area. Our gratitude recognises those who, each year, stretch their initial geographical aspirations to respond to the wider needs of the Connexion in the light of the apparent diminishing availability of those offering to serve the Circuits – where the need appears greatest.
- 9.5 Without these committed servants of the Church, ministry as we know it today would simply not exist. We await with interest the work of the Stationing Review Group and note that whatever recommendations are made to the Conference, radical change will require careful and considered introduction, so as to take effect at appropriate times in the stationing calendar. I trust the Conference will be assured of the commitment of this committee to serve the Connexion through times of change ahead.

***RESOLUTION

30/1. The Conference receives the Report.