

9. Methodist Forces Board

Contact name and details	The Revd Kevin Highfield – Chair of the Methodist Forces Board SFB@methodistchurch.org.uk
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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.
2. In the light of the deteriorating international security situation, and hearing the voices of chaplains, the Forces Board considered a number of ways it can support chaplaincy during this period of high stress and activity, and help the Church to address a more unstable and dangerous world. The Board is of the view that further work needs to be undertaken in the area of the theology and ethics of conflict and peace-making, in providing resources for Methodists to engage in a supportive ministry towards the families of those serving in the armed forces, and to evaluate the Board's own recruitment protocols should the armed forces urgently require more reserve and regular chaplains (see paragraph 14 and Resolution 3 below).

Activity

3. At the end of October 2024, the President of the Conference enjoyed a visit to the Royal Navy in Portsmouth. This visit gave the President a good insight into the workings of the Royal Navy and helpfully an opportunity to see chaplains in their own context. This included accompanying chaplains at HMS Collingwood, a visit to the Submarine Museum in Gosport, and a chance to see HMS Prince of Wales arriving home. 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 2024, the 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 2025, the chaplains received an update on matters affecting the Connexion. The presence of the President of the Conference, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Assistant Secretary of the Conference in the company was most appreciated. We said a fond farewell to the Revd David

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Barrett and the Revd Stewart Young. Both have given long and distinguished service to the British Army.

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. 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 2025.
8. The Armed Forces route to achieve Worship: Leading and Preaching status continues to have good engagement. The Board is extremely grateful to Cdr Mark Barton for continuing to oversee this work.
9. The Aldershot Methodist Military Trust (AMMT) continues to support the Hants-Surrey Border Circuit with its work in Aldershot Garrison. A new project has been approved for support in the Salisbury Circuit, where a deacon will be working with army families amongst others. Discussions are underway to support further applications from circuits seeking to work with military communities.
10. The Revd Dr Andrew Wood has settled well into the role of Secretary to the Forces Board (SFB). We have also been well served by the Chair of the Southampton District in supporting the chaplains. The chaplains deeply appreciate the support that they receive from the Connexion.
11. The role of Chair of the Forces Board has been very capably filled by the Revd Kevin Highfield, who brings with him a wealth of experience from the US military and a later-life calling to ministry in the Methodist Church in Britain.
12. 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.

Future plans

13. Partnership working between the MFB and the AMMT has built steadily throughout the year, with the release of significant resources to those Districts and Circuits who wish (further) to engage 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

14. In the near future, we believe church communities will need to understand what it is to be church in a time of conflict, and to be ready to speak and act in ways that are practically, pastorally and theologically rich. We plan for the Methodist Church to produce resources, rooted in scripture and teachings of the church, to help Methodists with theological reflections and practical tools for their ministry in a time of conflict. The Church's published statements on issues of war and peace should be reviewed in the light of the deteriorating security situation, with its associated challenges to the rules-based order of the international community. There is current ecumenical work being done with the Church of England on this. Reflections and tools might include:

- A brief theological approach to thinking about war, peace and conflict
- Theological concepts and scriptural passages that can be used in preaching and teaching
- Approaches and ideas to be used in speaking publicly in the wider community
- Pastoral approaches that should be considered in times of anxiety and conflict, doing justice to often contradictory convictions about issues of war and peace
- Practical resources that can be used in worship and in church buildings
- Practical suggestions for supporting military personnel and their families.

The aim of such resources would be to support Methodists to reflect on our calling to respond to the world as it is, rather than how we would like it to be. That may involve a significant mental shift from the long period of relative peace that Europe has experienced. The Forces Board will consider more flexible and adaptive processes to respond to a fast-moving defence and security situation. Our processes are currently designed for periods of stability and peace. As an example, it may become necessary to discern a call to chaplaincy from a wider range of ministerial experience than at present.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 9/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**
- 9/2. **The Conference thanks the Aldershot Methodist Military Trust for its enduring support to maintain a strong Methodist presence in the military, ministering**

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to serving personnel and their families, civil servants and contractors, to the glory of God.

- 9/3. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Methodist Forces Board and others as appropriate, to review reports and statements of the Conference relating to issues of war and peace in the light of the current global context and to report to the Conference of 2026.