Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	10/1. The Conference receives the Report. 10/2. The Conference amends the Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper as set out in paragraph 3.7 above. 10/3. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, to examine the question raised in paragraph 3.6 above and to report to the Conference not later than 2029. 10/4. The Conference permits the Faith and Order Committee to bring the proposals regarding childlessness and being child-free to the Conference of 2027.

Summary of Content and Impact

Subject and Aims	A general update on the work of the Faith and Order Committee. Amendments to the criteria for authorisations to persons other than presbyters to preside at the Lord's Supper
Main Points	• Introduction • Ways of working • Authorisations to preside • Other items of work

1 Introduction

1.1 The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by, and accountable to, the Methodist Conference. On behalf of the Conference, it helps to ensure that what the Methodist Church in Britain says and does is true to its self-understanding, mission and purpose. It therefore seeks to encourage a deepening of theological understanding, engagement with the Methodist tradition, and shared critical reflection in order to help discern Methodist perspectives and responses in all aspects of the Church's life.

1.2 Under SO 210(11) the Faith and Order Committee has a specific role requiring it to be consulted on all matters directly concerning the faith and order of the Church presented to the Conference by other bodies, and now also on any matters directly concerning the faith and order of the Church to be decided by the Connexional Council under its own authority. The Committee is conscious in the new structures and ways of working that work in the Ministries and Mission Committees may fall into either of those categories. Considering such matters often requires consultation with the full committee, and potentially some collaborative working, and the Committee is therefore grateful for early conversations to establish effective and constructive ways of working and reflecting as the work develops. Conversations as a new group is set up and the process for developing the work is established are particularly appreciated. All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary of the Committee.

2 The Work of the Committee

2.1 The Committee is deeply grateful to the many people who volunteer their time to enable its work. In this connexional year, we welcomed two new members to the Committee and further nominations are being presented to this Conference. As well as seeking to maintain a broad range of experience and theological knowledge, the Committee is constantly attentive to the need to widen the diversity of the Committee. The Chair of the Faith and Order Committee, the Revd Dr Martin Wellings, completes his six-year term of office at the conclusion of this connexional year. The Committee is extremely grateful for his wise, insightful and measured leadership and guidance and wishes to express its profound thanks for his ministry among us. The Revd Drs Graham Edwards, Catrin Harland-Davies and Caroline Wickens also complete their six-year term this year and each have made significant and valuable contributions to the work of the Committee, which is glad to take this opportunity to record its deep gratitude to them all.

2.2 Each year the Committee reflects on its ways of working and seeks to work as effectively as possible. The Committee is aware that there are various expectations of what the Committee does, what it is responsible for, and the kind of decisions it can make. The role and remit of the Faith and Order Committee is set out in Standing Order 210.

2.3 A common misassumption is about the role that the Committee plays in the theological life of the Church. Although it does have a responsibility to "stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church" (SO 210(4)),

it is important to note that the Faith and Order Committee is just one part of the process of theological reflection. It does have a particular role to play in helping the Conference and the Connexional Council make decisions which have implications for the faith and order of the Church. This often involves both a broad theological understanding and particular (and often detailed) knowledge of Methodist theology, polity and the relevant theological subject areas, which is more than just academic expertise. In addition, much of the work of the Committee requires the ability to read and process significant paperwork, too often at short notice, and with a careful attention to detail. Whilst not every member of the Committee needs to be proficient in every area, these are the gifts and knowledge needed to be able to carry out the Committee's work.

2.4 Given that the Committee is not, and should not be, the only place where theological thinking happens, then it does have a concern for the theological life of the Church and how theological thinking is facilitated in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts, the Connexional Team, and connexional working parties, committees and other bodies. Its own desire to play a part in stimulating theological thinking has often been thwarted by a heavy workload and immediate demands. This is likely to be mirrored in many other contexts and continues to be an issue of concern.

2.5 When the Conference directs the Committee to undertake a piece of work on a specific topic then the Committee would usually work with other people; either through establishing a working group that draws on a variety of people with different experience and perspectives relevant to the subject, or through reflection days, conversations or different forms of consultation. For many of the reports it brings to the Conference, therefore, it has worked with people outside of the Committee and from many parts of the Church's life.

2.6 In order for the Committee to be able to fulfil its responsibilities it requires not only the skills and knowledge indicated above, but also a commitment of time and attention. As in many areas of the Methodist Church's life, committee members are volunteers. In a context when many people are already overloaded, finding people who have the time and availability is a challenge.

2.7 The Committee also notes that, like many others, it undertakes much of its work under pressure in order to meet Conference and other deadlines. This affects the extent and nature of any consultation (which, if done well, always takes time, attention and resourcing), the opportunity to engage in more proactive and creative thinking, and the time and ability to develop skills for faith and order work. The Committee has given thought to how it might help to develop

the particular skills and expertise needed for its work and has explored and is exploring various possibilities including mentoring, creating further opportunities for involvement in its work, training or study days or sessions in particular areas and paying attention to different ways of identifying people for particular pieces of work. It has been encouraged at the response to the recent advertisements, both for the Committee itself and for the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee. We continue to be keen to identify people with potential for faith and order work even if they do not have all the skills needed at present.

3 Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper

3.1 The Conference of 2023 substantially amended the criteria for granting authorisations to persons other than presbyters to preside at the Lord's Supper, following work by the Faith and Order Committee and the Authorisations Committee.[1] The Conference directed the two Committees to keep the new criteria under review and to bring any recommendations necessary to a future Conference. A point of difficulty since the change of criteria has been about the concept of the 'blurring of the distinctions between particular callings and ministries.' While this was not new in the revised criteria, it has become a more significant question, especially with a wider range of lay ministry roles, including local lay-pastors. It connects to the nature of authorisations as a temporary measure distinct from the lifelong ministry committed to a person by ordination.[2]

3.2 The Faith and Order Committee and the Authorisations Committee have therefore worked together to consider how best to address this issue. The Committees are agreed that it would be appropriate to make amendments to the criteria to address more clearly the situation of local lay-pastors and to provide more guidance as to what constitutes blurring of roles. The Committees considered whether, by analogy with the situation for deacons, it should be proposed that local lay-pastors not be eligible to be granted authorisations. However, it was felt that this would be a disproportionate measure and lack the necessary flexibility, particularly in contexts with very few people available to serve.

3.3 Standing Order 56A0(3) provides that local lay-pastors 'shall not by virtue of this office be authorised to preach or lead worship, preside at the Lord's Supper, or

1 *Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper*: https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-23-pc-29-authorisations-to-preside-at-the-lords-supper.pdf

2 Standing Order 011(5) provides that 'no person may hold an authorisation for a continuous period in excess of six years.'

administer baptism'. This is the enactment in Standing Orders of the discussion in *Changing Patterns of Ministry*[3] which provided that:

- Local lay-pastors will not normally have authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper, nor lead services of baptism.[4]
- Sacramental ministry is not part of the ministry of a local lay-pastor. Presiding at the Lord's Supper and baptising belong to presbyteral ministry and will usually be undertaken by presbyters in the Circuit.
    a. It is recognised that some parts of the Connexion are struggling with eucharistic deprivation. The Methodist Church already makes provision for this, however, through granting authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper where the Conference discerns that such situations exist and that there is an appropriate person to undertake this ministry temporarily. Authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper should not be applied for, nor granted, as part of the role of a local lay-pastor. It might be that there are occasions when a Local Lay-Pastor is discerned to be the most appropriate person in the Circuit to have an authorisation to preside at the Lord's Supper, but this will be because of their standing in the Circuit and not as part of their role as a local lay-pastor.[5]

3.4 The report accompanying the previous revision of the criteria also considered this point and observed, 'such occasions will be extremely rare due to the potential for confusion of roles granting an authorisation to a local lay-pastor will create. Circuits making such applications will need to be very clear as to why someone who is also a local lay-pastor is nevertheless discerned to be the most appropriate person to be authorised.'[6] While all this makes clear that authorisations to preside should not be granted ***as part*** of the role of a local lay-pastor, the Committee believes that further clarification of the process to be followed when an application is made for someone who also holds the role of local lay-pastor would be beneficial. In addition, it is recommended that text be added to the criteria to highlight the issues in relation to this. It is suggested that Circuits applying should be required to explain clearly the reasons why they are applying for an authorisation for someone who is also a local lay-pastor. Attention is drawn to Standing Order 56A0(4) which provides that a role whose duties are substantially those of a local lay-pastor shall be deemed to constitute that role, however it is described.

---

3 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2021-26-changing-patterns-of-ministry_z9XGTNk.pdf
4 *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 4.4.6
5 *Changing Patterns of Ministry,* 4.4.9
6 *Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper,* 3.5

3.5 While the concept of blurring does depend on a case-by-case assessment of the circumstances of the applying Circuit, from the Committees' consideration the principal cause of concern is where a role is created that appears to be intended to function as if it were a presbyteral role. It is proposed to add a statement to this effect to the criteria as an example of the blurring of particular roles and ministries. Lastly, the opportunity has been taken to remove gender binary language in paragraph 4 of the criteria.

3.6 In the course of the Committees' consideration of these questions, there was wide awareness of the challenges faced in many Circuits in providing appropriate ministry for the celebration of the sacraments that both meets the needs locally and is in conformity with the discipline of the church. The Committees noted current provision for candidating for local and specific contexts and also previous considerations of non-stipendiary[7] and more local forms of ordained ministry. To explore these questions in detail or to make proposals upon them would have been outside the remit of the current task, but it was felt appropriate that the question as to whether there should be further exploration of these issues should be put to the Conference.

3.7 The Faith and Order Committee and the Authorisations Committee therefore propose the following amendments to the criteria for adoption by the Conference:

3. Authorisations are granted for someone to assist across a Circuit and should be exercised at the direction of the Superintendent. Appropriate consideration should be given to ensure that the exercise of the authorisation responds to the particular needs for which it was sought and helps to meet them. Authorisations are not related to any particular local role ~~(eg lay employee or local lay pastor)~~ a person may have and the holding of any such role is not a relevant factor in determining suitability to be granted an authorisation. ***In particular, authorisations should not be applied for, nor granted, as part of the role of a local lay-pastor. It might be that there are occasions when a local lay-pastor is discerned to be the most appropriate person in the Circuit to have an authorisation, but this will be because of their standing in the Circuit and not as part of their role as a local lay-pastor. Furthermore, careful consideration should be given to where any such person presides in the Circuit. Where application is nevertheless made for an authorisation to be granted to a person also***

7 *Changing Patterns of Ministry,* 5.2.4, noted that the Methodist Church does not have a separate category of non-stipendiary ministry but that it is possible for a minister to be stationed without payment of a stipend.

serving as a local lay-pastor, the Circuit must give a clear account of its discernment and its plans to avoid confusion between roles.

3A. In circumstances where the committee judges that ~~such an arrangement~~ ***the granting of an authorisation*** might lead to a blurring of the distinctions between particular callings and ministries, the Authorisations Committee may decline to recommend an authorisation for a given named individual even when the other criteria are met. ***Such blurring occurs, for example, where the arrangements made in relation to a particular role appear to intend it to function as if the person occupying it were a presbyter.*** An authorisation will not normally be granted to those whose offer as candidates for presbyteral ministry has been declined. Where this is nevertheless deemed appropriate, such an application would not be granted within five years of the declined offer. In such cases, the vocational issues should first be thoroughly explored by the superintendent with the person concerned before the application goes to a circuit meeting.

4. To assess the suitability of the person proposed, evidence shall be presented to the district Policy Committee of ~~his or her~~ ***the person's***

   a. general competence, gifts and graces in leading worship with respect to the contexts in question, and
   b. understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The written consent of the person proposed is also required.

4 Other specific items of work

4.1 The Committee has several items of work currently in progress, many of which are due to report to the 2027 Conference. Among these are:

4.2 Anglican-Methodist Covenant: The Committee continues to be aware of the outstanding directions of the Conference and the Methodist Council in relation to this work and draws attention to the report of the *Life in Covenant* group elsewhere in the Agenda. The Committee will report on developments in the Faith and Order aspects of the work when possible.

4.3 Being childless/childfree. The Conference of 2025 directed the Committee to bring proposals on the possibility of work in this area to this Conference. While the Committee has given this some consideration this year, it asks the

Conference's permission to give further careful consideration and bring proposals to the Conference of 2027.

4.4 The Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) has asked the Faith and Order Committee to assist in forming a theological underpinning for its work rather than seeking detailed theological reports on particular questions as they arise. The aim is to draw on existing Methodist/wider Christian thinking, to articulate our theological approaches to JACEI's seven pillars for ethical investment. This work is in hand.

4.5 At the request of the Safeguarding Committee, worship resources are being produced to assist Local Churches to engage with the Theology of Safeguarding report in the context of worship. It is intended that they will be branded as a further resource in the God Welcomes All series, which already has a study guide for the Theology of Safeguarding report.

4.6 The Conference of 2025 directed the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Methodist Forces Board, the Joint Public Issues Team, and others as appropriate, to create theological and pastoral resources to support the Methodist people in the light of

a) the current global context of increasing conflict and insecurity, and
b) the reports and public statements of the Church relating to issues of war and peace

and to report to the Conference of 2026.

A working group with broad representation, including from military chaplains, the Joint Public Issues Team and the Methodist Peace Fellowship as well as the Committee has been considering this and seeking to discern what is most helpful to offer. A further update will be offered to the Conference when this report is presented.

4.7 The Committee is planning to report to the Conference of 2027 on the following matters:

Deauthorisation/withdrawal of authorised liturgical resources
Living well with contradictory convictions
Membership transfers and appeals (with the Law and Polity Committee)
Proposal re: healing ministry
Proposal re: childlessness/being childfree

*****RESOLUTIONS**

10/1. The Conference receives the Report.

10/2. The Conference amends the Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper as set out in paragraph 3.7 above.

10/3. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, to examine the question raised in paragraph 3.6 above and to report to the Conference not later than 2029.

10/4. The Conference permits the Faith and Order Committee to bring the proposals regarding childlessness and being child-free to the Conference of 2027.