

Leadership in the Connexion

(INCLUDING THE CONNEXIONAL TEAM)

EVER since the role of an individual, Wesley, was replaced by that of a Conference, Methodism has always emphasised the importance of the corporate body. It has seen the corporate body as primary and the role of the individual as derived from it, so that in every sense individuals represent the

[2] In Methodist tradition, leadership is a constituent part of the primary function and dynamic known as oversight. This again applies primarily to the Conference, and then secondarily to individuals who represent it. Thus (as the 2006 *Review of the Conference* puts it)

[3] The Conference therefore primarily exists to exercise oversight in the broadest sense of the term. It seeks to focus, renew and nurture the whole connexion's worship of God and participation in God's mission. In doing so it seeks to ensure that the whole connexion remains true to its calling and to its experience and place in an apostolic succession of faithful response and witness to the Gospel. It therefore stands at the heart of the connexion, connecting it with its past and its future, linking it with external bodies and joining together its constituent parts.....

[4] Another major function of the Conference is in the collective exercise of leadership. This involves harvesting the insights of its members, inspiring them to be imaginative and empowering them to share their ideas and develop new vision. It then involves the Conference in providing a model for the rest of the Connexion of articulating vision, of initiating action and encouraging people to follow, and of providing models of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.

[5] In the institution or collective body that is the Methodist Church, those who are recognised as senior leaders (lay and

ordained) are normally appointed to hold some appropriate office. They are by definition role models in a movement of disciples. Their leadership is as much spiritual as it is organisational or a matter of bureaucratic service.

[6] These senior leaders in the connexion (lay and ordained) are each located in or appointed to a particular part of the connexion where she or he exercises particular responsibilities. Thus Chairs are embedded in a particular District. Similarly, of those others who are currently recognised as senior leaders, the Warden of the Diaconal Order is embedded in the Methodist Diaconal Order; the Co-ordinating Secretaries in the Connexional Team; the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee in that Committee; and the members of the Presidency (i.e. the current, ex- and designate Presidents and Vice-Presidents) in and on behalf of the Conference, which they represent and embody in a particular way as they move around the Connexion.

Yet as well as exercising leadership in a particular part of the Connexion, each senior leader has a role to play in a collective exercise of leadership on behalf of the Conference for the whole connexion. Thus with regard to District Chairs:

[8] In exercising the oversight and responsibilities outlined above (sc. earlier in the report), a District Chair is not just relating to the particular context of the district to which she or he is appointed, but also to the wider context of the whole connexion. Chairs are not so much Chairs of a particular district, in the sense

[8 cont'd] *of only belonging to the district and only having authority and responsibility in it. Rather they are Chairs appointed by the Conference for a particular district, in the sense of belonging to the whole Connexion through the Conference and as such being assigned particular functions and responsibilities in the affairs of the Connexion beyond the district because of the particular knowledge and experience they have by virtue of their office. (What is a District Chair? Conference 2006 para. 27).*

[9] Similar things can be said of the other types of senior leader in the Connexion. Each is located in a particular part of the Connexion and appointed to exercise leadership there, but also to share in doing so collectively for the whole connexion.

[10] Following the report to the 2002 Conference entitled *Leadership in the Methodist Church* the senior leaders throughout the Connexion have come together regularly to share in exercising their collective leadership for the whole Connexion. This collective body is currently identified as the Connexional Leadership Team (CLT), the starting point for which is S.O. 302(2) *"The General Secretary shall be responsible for leading the development of the vision, mission and strategy of the Church, and shall be the executive leader of a management and leadership team, comprising also the Co-ordinating Secretaries, the District Chairs and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order"*. That Team has rightly been extended to include the current, ex- and designate Presidents and Vice-Presidents (sc. the Presidency) and the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

[11] The predominant emphasis of this Connexional Leadership Team (CLT) is on people coming together to share in a collective form of strategic leadership, in the sense of

- ◇ prayerful theological reflection that is shared through a process of Christian conferring;
- ◇ the development and owning of a common vision;
- ◇ watching over one another in love to embody support for one another in each member's personal practice;

- ◇ providing models of exercising power with mercy and of exercising authority with justice and love.

(The latter two functions are currently done in the CLT through small groups, the former two through plenaries or large groups.)

[12] In order to fulfill this vital function of leadership for the Connexion, it is important that CLT does not act as a governance body which formulates the principle purposes and policies of the Church, sets parameters for their implementation, makes rules and regulations and ensures compliance. That is the job of the Conference and, under it, the Council, Faith & Order, Law & Polity and Stationing Committees. CLT is not that sort of decision-making body.

[13] The aspect of "management" that is mentioned in S.O. 302(2) is more problematic, however, and the S.O. perhaps needs amending in order to make things clearer. A working description of management in the context of a connexional Church is of "working under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship to

- ◇ formulate specific and detailed strategies for enacting the church's policies and fulfilling its purposes
- ◇ set particular objectives concerning the implementation of those strategies
- ◇ deploy human, financial, capital (e.g. investments and buildings) and technological resources to achieve those objectives
- ◇ monitor and assess the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the Objectives".

Yet CLT is not a place where "specific and detailed strategies" can be devised or micro-management decisions made, either for the Connexion as a whole or for a particular part of it. It is too large, infrequent and unwieldy for that. As with the aspect of governance above, is not that sort of decision-making body.

[15] Most of the senior leaders in the Connexion, however, exercise what might be termed functions of executive or strategic management as an outworking of their leadership in the parts of the Connexion in which they are located. In this they coordinate and oversee the individual officers or collective groups of officers who are best suited to undertake most of the tasks of

[15 cont'd] management outlined above in each part of the Connexion, working in conjunction with the various committees and governance bodies which set the framework for them in each particular place. For example, so far as the work of the Connexional Team is concerned the tasks of management are undertaken and overseen by the Joint Secretaries Group, who co-ordinate management functions which are delegated to senior staff. Similarly, so far as the work of the Districts is concerned the tasks are undertaken by District Officers led by their Chair.

[16] There is an important sense, therefore, in which as they come together to confer and exercise oversight and strategic leadership for the Connexion, CLT acts as the "staff meeting" of those who exercise executive or strategic management responsibilities in the various parts of the Connexion, be that as Chairs in Districts, as Warden in the MDO, as General Secretary and Co-ordinating Secretaries in the Connexional Team, or as Chair of the SRC. In this they are dealing matters relating to the implementation of policies and decisions in a general, strategic sense because, as noted above, CLT is not the place for dealing with "specific and detailed strategies". Attention therefore needs to be paid to how these "staff meeting" discussions best take place, without CLT falling into "fix-it decision-making mode". This involves the spirit of the personal conversations which currently take place in small groups at CLT where people "watch over one another in love" being developed into corporate discussions where those who come together to exercise leadership by sharing insights and developing vision that can be placed before the Conference and other governance bodies also support one another in implementing whatever vision the Conference eventually owns or adopts.

[17] Within that "staff meeting", the members of the Presidency (as defined in 4 above) play an important and distinctive role. Although they have some executive management responsibilities on behalf of the Conference, these are not large in number or extent except for the particular tasks of the current President (e.g. in stationing and authorising presbyters and deacons, and in dealing with their resignations). But it has to be remembered that the main purposes of CLT are the exercise of oversight and, within that, of leadership in particular; and the members of the Presidency are very much part of the leadership of the whole Church. Through their

experience and their exercise of their respective roles they have a lot of insights that they can offer, and are able to offer a lot of support to the others.

[18] All strategic leaders represent the Conference collectively and individually, and have a part to play in exercising oversight (in the senses outlined above) on its behalf. All are officers of the Conference, and have to uphold the rights and responsibilities of the Conference, acting as whistleblowers where necessary. But checks and balances against power and the possibility of challenge are expressed through collegiality in that collective body, rather than through formalised antagonistic structures and roles. There is no formal opposition set up to a Chair in a District or a Superintendent in a Circuit, nor to the General Secretary/ Secretary of Conference or the President and Vice-President. Rather all share in a common discipline to be under oversight and a common duty to exercise oversight. The bringing together of the General Secretary role with that of the Secretary of Conference was intended to embody that insight and avoid fragmentation. If it were ever to be felt that it would be beneficial for the two roles to be held by different people (and the S.O.116 already allows for many of the functions of the Secretary of the Conference to be delegated to the current Co-ordinating Secretaries or other appropriate officers) they would still need to be bound together and integrated within a single framework.

Future developments

[19] Standing Order 302 clearly states that the General Secretary is the General Secretary of and for the whole Methodist church, not just the Connexional Team. As such, he or she is different from both the Co-ordinating Secretaries (and their successors – see the proposals below) and the Chairs, not to mention the other senior leaders who are members of CLT. This needs to be clearly expressed in the workings of CLT and related processes amongst the senior leaders of the Connexion. At present in terms of management or accountability under oversight the members of the current Joint Secretaries Group (consisting of the Co-ordinating Secretaries and the General Secretary/Secretary of Conference) are corporately accountable to the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) for the exercise of their responsibilities with regard both to the Connexional Team and the wider Connexion. The Co-ordinating Secretaries are

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[19 cont'd] then personally accountable to the General Secretary, who is in turn accountable to the Chair of SRC. Similarly, the Chairs' line of accountability is to their District Policy Committee with regard to the district-facing part of their responsibilities, but it is very unclear where the line of accountability lies concerning the connexion-facing part. One possibility might be to develop further the parallel with the current Co-ordinating Secretaries, and for the General Secretary to become a more regular member of the Chairs' own meeting, which then exercises corporate accountability to some body such as the SRC or the Methodist Council; and (in the light of the numbers involved) for the Chairs to be personally accountable to peers reporting to the General Secretary. In any event, the issue probably needs addressing, and it is clear CLT is not the place for such accountability to be exercised.

[20] We have outlined above how senior leaders come together both to share insights and develop vision, and to confer about how the vision and policies adopted by the Conference for the Connexion might be implemented. This involves elements of strategic management within the strategic leadership. The senior leaders confer and work together on issues of general, connexion-wide implementation. They then have a role in setting the parameters for implementing the policies in the particular part of the Connexion to which they are appointed and in which they are located. In other words they have to ensure that a strategic framework of policies and objectives is set for their part of the Connexion within which the individual officers in that place will manage the work.

This distinction between leaders who exercise some strategic management, and managers who exercise day-to-day power and responsibility for achieving objectives underlies the proposals for the reshaped Connexional Team. Instead of the current Joint Secretaries Group (the General Secretary/Secretary of the Conference and the Co-ordinating Secretaries), the proposals are that there should be three Secretaries who work with the General Secretary/Secretary of the Conference in leading the Connexional Team (just as other leaders work with the General Secretary/Secretary of Conference in exercising leadership in other parts of the Connexion – see para 14 above). The three Secretaries and the other leaders in the Connexion would all work with the General Secretary/Secretary of Conference in

the Connexional Leadership Team. The Secretaries have been provisionally delineated as follows:

- ◇ The General Secretary/Secretary of the Conference would be as agreed by the forthcoming review of those posts.
- ◇ A 'Secretary for Internal Relationships' would focus on the Team's relationship with the wider Connexion, networking with all members of the Connexional Leadership Team, developing communications between the Conference and the whole Church and facilitating policy development relating to the Church's diverse ministries (lay and ordained). ['Internal' here, then, means internal to the British Methodist Church as a whole].
- ◇ A 'Secretary for External Relationships' would focus on networks with other Christian bodies (in Britain and worldwide) and a wide range of non-Church organisations and groups; and share in leading the Church's prophetic witness to wider society.
- ◇ A 'Secretary for Connexional Team Operations' would have responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the Connexional Team, especially the infrastructure and technical functions.

[22] These four Secretaries would act as leaders of the Team and would share a strong commitment to working collaboratively with the wider connexion, especially the districts, under the direction of the Conference and the Council.

[23] The focus of their shared task would be leadership, for the Team and in the wider Church, i.e.

to enable a widely-owned vision to emerge to guide the mission of the Church;

to help the Church identify priorities and strategic objectives towards implementing the vision;

to ensure synergies between the contributions of the districts, the Connexional Team and other partners; and

to inspire policy-development in support of good practice and to ensure delivery of the Church's objectives.

[24] A description of the planned role of such a leader in the Team will therefore include elements that are common to other Methodist leaders. In this regard, it is worth bearing in mind the characteristics of a District Chair summarised in the report *What is a District Chair?* which was adopted at the 2006 Conference. Similarly, the role of the Secretary in the Team will show some common features with the characteristics intended for the Senior Managers in the reconfigured Team. The list below gives a flavour of what will be sought in the Strategic Leaders.

The four Secretaries in the reconfigured Team would work as a group but have distinctly different personal briefs. In particular, the Secretary for Connexional Team Operations has a major management role of a different sort from his or her colleagues. The characteristics that need to be present in the group as a whole will not necessarily be present in equal proportions in all four office-holders and in the following list elements that are not necessarily in the job description or person specification of every jobholder are marked with an asterisk.

[26] **Functions and Tasks: shared with others**

- ◇ Identify the Methodist Church's contemporary mission
- ◇ Develop and articulate Church strategy and policy
- ◇ Bring strategic leadership perspectives to governance bodies
- ◇ Build networks with stakeholders within and beyond the Connexion
- ◇ Evaluate and manage risk and performance

[27] **Skills**

- ◇ Holding the wider vision
- ◇ Moving from vision to practice
- ◇ Communicating with different audiences
- ◇ Effective listening
- ◇ Motivating staff and volunteers
- ◇ Delegating and Empowering
- ◇ Able to question constructively
- ◇ Staff management*
- ◇ Financial including budget management*

[28] **Attitudes**

- ◇ Collaborative
- ◇ Seeking excellence
- ◇ Confident
- ◇ Questioning
- ◇ Open
- ◇ Enthusiastic
- ◇ Leads by example
- ◇ Looks to innovate

[29] **Qualities**

- ◇ Self-awareness
- ◇ Willing vulnerability
- ◇ Able to inspire
- ◇ Self-motivated
- ◇ Willing to learn
- ◇ Christian discipleship
- ◇ Personal standing in Connexion*

[30] **Knowledge**

- ◇ Leadership styles
- ◇ Strategic planning
- ◇ Governance processes
- ◇ Connexional memory*
- ◇ Cultural Context*
- ◇ Methodist constituencies*
- ◇ Legislation*

[31] **Experience**

- ◇ Working in partnerships
- ◇ Skills transfer between different settings
- ◇ World Church*
- ◇ Leadership in a faith community*
- ◇ Leadership in other spheres*
- ◇ Methodist presbyter*
- ◇ Management of large teams*

[32] It is also proposed that most of the management of areas of the Team would be devolved to five 'Managers'. what were called in October the Senior Managers (Greens). They would work closely with each other as a collaborative group as well as with the Secretaries. Although there are some members of the current Connexional Team who have management responsibilities, the role of Manager proposed here is new. The following list outlines what JSG envisage a Manager in the Team might be like using the same categories as for Secretaries. As with the latter, these are essentially generic points which would be supplemented by specific requirements for each individual post.

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[33] Functions and Tasks

- ◇ Work effectively within agreed delegated policies
- ◇ Lead and manage own staff and communicate well with them
- ◇ Hold and manage budgets
- ◇ Assess and manage risks
- ◇ Meet high standards of practice

[34] Skills

- ◇ Manage complex and competing demands
- ◇ Project management
- ◇ Collaborative working
- ◇ Able to argue own case within loyalty to organisation
- ◇ Able to achieve credibility

[35] Attitudes

- ◇ Committed to Connexionalism and interdependence
- ◇ Confidence in own ability as a manager
- ◇ Welcomes delegation within agreed tolerances
- ◇ Wants to collaborate with other managers
- ◇ Owns organisation's vision, values and goals

[36] Qualities

- ◇ Christian Commitment
- ◇ Integrity and Honesty
- ◇ Enthusiasm
- ◇ Self Awareness
- ◇ Keen to keep learning

[37] Knowledge

- ◇ Expertise in particular areas of Team's work
- ◇ World and societal context
- ◇ Relevant legislation
- ◇ Relevant performance indicators

[38] Experience

- ◇ Managing and developing people
- ◇ Managing budgets and resources
- ◇ Expertise in own area of work

[39] The development of Managers in the Connexional Team who exercise day-to-day power and responsibility for achieving objectives should free the Secretaries to exercise proper leadership.

NB Paragraphs 21-39 in the above are slightly re-edited versions of material in Council papers MC/06/93B and MC/06/119.