

## The deployment of ministers: matching and identifying significant appointments

### The Connexional Principle

In considering 'contemporary articulations and expressions of connexionalism', the most recent resource is the Conference report *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* which was received by the 2015 Conference and commended for study and reflection. (Responses were requested and a further report is to be presented to the 2017 Conference. It can be downloaded from <http://www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2015-reports>)

The report noted that 'For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian' (paragraph 4). It further noted that 'Connexionalism has a strong missionary dynamic, enabling the effective deployment of resources in the service of God's mission, and challenging parochial attitudes and assumptions' (paragraph 12). It is this aspiration of connexionalism which this discussion paper takes as its starting point.

### Ordained Ministry

Perhaps the clearest articulation of connexionalism has been the pattern of itinerant ministry. It is a pattern that has evolved and developed, but remained core to the way in which the whole connexion shares ordained ministry. That deacons are directly matched to appointments whereas presbyters are ordinarily part of a matching process reveals that there are already different models at work in the matching and stationing process.

Until 2004 there had been in place an identification of some appointments on the Stations as Priority Appointments. These were established as follows:

- (a) *The connexional Stationing Policy Sub-Committee is responsible for assessing the needs of the Church, and each year will classify certain appointments as 'priority'. This may be because they are in areas providing unusual opportunities requiring special skills on the part of a minister, or in places of missionary opportunity, including new or growth areas, or major chaplaincies, or areas of significant ecumenical partnership. In exceptional circumstances this category may be granted to places where the Church is threatened by a lack of people or resources, such as rural Circuits geographically isolated, or situations of deprivation and a disadvantaged population in inner city or council estate.*
- (b) *Where there is a priority appointment the Circuit forfeits the right to engage in the normal invitation process. Priority appointments will be filled by the Stationing Policy Sub-Committee and the Search Group acting together on behalf of the Stationing Committee.*
- (c) *Approaches may be made to ministers to undertake such appointments from the end of September, eleven months prior to the vacancy occurring. They will normally be filled by ministers who are available for appointment in the same year as the vacancy occurs. Ministers are expected to respond positively except in exceptional circumstances. In such cases the Chairs of the Districts involved should be consulted and involved in the negotiations and will be responsible for consultation with the circuit stewards and the minister concerned and, in the case of an appointment of the kind dealt with in one of the clauses (1) to (4A) of Standing Order 540, the Chair of the District in which the Circuit lies will be responsible for consultation with the persons or bodies specified in that clause and for ensuring that the Search Group has full information as to the views of all such persons and bodies.*

*From the Guidance section of 1997 edition of CPD*

The 2003 Conference noted that the Stationing Committee had put in place a new criteria for priority appointments as follows:

- (a) Multi-ethnic communities where the Methodist congregation speaks a first language other than English.
- (b) Multi-faith communities where the Christians require interfaith experience or knowledge as a key element in the appointment.
- (c) New areas of missionary opportunity where new congregations are being planted in an ecumenical context.
- (d) The single Methodist congregation with over 350 members where the Church judges special skills in leadership and management are required.
- (e) Areas of serious social deprivation, rural or urban, where it is important the Church remains.
- (f) Situations where there is a programme of radical change in place leading to new ways of being Church. This could be rural or urban.
- (g) Circuit appointments where more than twenty hours a week are spent in a chaplaincy requiring specialised skills.
- (h) City centre appointments that are sponsored by the District Synod under Standing Order 440(8).

### **Current Situation**

The 2004 Conference abolished the concept of connexional priority appointments noting that: *Although a useful idea in earlier times, it had become clear that designation of priority appointments had become untenable. Many Circuits and presbyters were no longer willing to recognise the designation as a requirement on them to forego a significant element of choice in the matter. In one sense all appointments are priority but, beyond starting out with the superintendency, the 2005 stationing round will be dependent on Districts indicating their own priorities and bringing those to the Stationing Matching Group as it conducts its business.*

There was an experiment in 2007/2008, whereby Districts were permitted to substitute no more than two non-superintendency appointments into what was then termed the superintendency round. Such substitutions had to fit the 'Priorities for the Methodist Church' criteria, and be agreed by the relevant regional stationing group.

It is now for the District Chair, who will have consulted with the District Lay Stationing Representative, to determine in which order to call appointments during the process for the matching of presbyters to appointments. Now that we have ministry deployment figures, there is a need to ensure that these reflect the ministry priorities within each District.

The 2010 Conference received the following paragraph from the Stationing Committee: *The proposed changes to these arrangements will enable District Policy Committees (or their equivalent), following consultation with the circuits or other stations in the district, to allocate annually the number of ordained presbyters and deacons and ministerial probationers to be available to each circuit or other group, in accordance with mission priorities. The Committee proposes that the decision of the DPC be confirmed by the District Synod in April or September each year.*

Research suggests that the figure which is allocated to each District does not seem to match any other figure (eg the number of ministers appointed to the circuits, or the number of paid full time equivalents), so it would be interesting to know how meaningful these numbers now are. Are they being reviewed annually in each District? It seems possible that they could be used to greater effect in determining priorities within each District.

How an appointment enters the process is therefore in need of some attention. In offering his reflections to the 2016 Conference, the Secretary observed that there is a need to revisit the

question of 'priorities' in the way in which ministers are deployed. Having sufficient funds to submit a profile in the stationing matching process should not be the only criterion on which the Conference stations a minister to a particular context.

In light of this the Secretary began conversations at the CLF and at the Chairs' Meeting and now at the Council to reflect on whether the time is ripe for a new articulation of some form of priority or significant stationing, and what the criteria might be now (including funding).