

## Developing Vocations

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Discussion
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### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	This paper aims to provide the Council with an update on various interlinked areas of work relating to vocations and poses ideas for discussion.
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Ministry in the Methodist Church [Faith and Order Committee]</li> <li>• Leadership and vocation [Methodist Council]</li> <li>• Probationer studies and the first five years in ministry [Ministries Committee]</li> <li>• Continuing Development in Ministry [Ministries Committee]</li> <li>• Sabbaticals [Ministries Committee]</li> <li>• Structured supervision [Past Cases Review Implementation Group]</li> <li>• Leadership across Districts [Larger Than Circuit]</li> <li>• Church and circuit steward training [Discipleship and Ministries]</li> <li>• Reflections from the Stationing Advisory Committee [SAC]</li> <li>• Recommendations for a coherent approach to developing vocations</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (in the order they are referenced in the text)</b>	<p>Faith and Order Committee Report to the 2016 Conference (32)</p> <p>MC/16/20 – Resourcing Leadership Working Party</p> <p>MC/16/47 – Resourcing Leadership</p> <p>Methodist Council, part 2 Report to the 2016 Conference (24)</p> <p>Report on the Implementation of the Past Cases Review Report: Courage, Cost and Hope to the 2016 Conference (34)</p> <p>Larger Than Circuit Report to the 2016 Conference (15)</p>

## Developing Vocations

### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 This paper aims to provide the Council with an update on various interlinked areas of work relating to vocations. I have recently established a small group from within the Team (Helen Cameron, the Assistant Secretary of the Conference; Jonathan Hustler, Ministerial Co-ordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries; Richard Andrew, Director of Learning and Development; Paul Wood, Coordinator, Ministry Development) to take an overview of various interrelated areas of work, which include:

- Ministry in the Methodist Church [Faith and Order Committee]
- Leadership and vocation [Methodist Council]
- Probationer studies and the first five years in ministry [Ministries Committee]
- Continuing Development in Ministry [Ministries Committee]
- Sabbaticals [Ministries Committee]
- Leadership across Districts [Larger Than Circuit]
- Church and circuit steward training [Discipleship and Ministries]
- Proposals from the Stationing Advisory Committee [SAC]

So as to understand fully the context a brief note on each of these areas is given below.

### 2.0 Ministry in the Methodist Church [Faith and Order Committee]

2.1 The Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2016 Conference noted that: "The 2014 Conference directed that the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee undertake work on the theology and nature of lay and ordained ministry in the Methodist Church and bring an interim report to the 2016 Conference and a final report no later than the 2018 Conference (Resolution 35/2)... It is intended that the final report, due to be received by the 2018 Conference, will be presented for adoption and consideration as a Conference Statement under SO 129; and this report will also contain resources to encourage further discussion and reflection on ministry in the Methodist Church" (paras. 6.1 and 6.7).

### 3.0 Leadership and vocation [Methodist Council]

3.1 The Resourcing Leadership Working Party was appointed by the Methodist Council in response to Notice of Motion 206 (2014) and reported to the Council in January 2016 (MC/16/20). A number of related areas of work were highlighted by the Council, including the "report on ministry in the Methodist Church being prepared by the Faith and Order Committee; work in the Ministries Committee on probationer studies, the first five years in ministry, continuing development in ministry and sabbaticals; pilots for structured supervision following the Past Cases Review (cf MC/15/86); recommendations from the Larger than Circuit Working Group about the exercise of leadership across districts (MC/16/19); and, work in the Connexional Team on church and circuit stewards training. The Council recognised that these pieces of work had a significant bearing upon the understanding and resourcing of leadership" (MC/16/47, para. 1.1).

3.2 The working party made a series of recommendations in areas where it felt work could be developed immediately, ie:

- The appointment of a Connexional Vocations Officer
- Vocational exploration, learning and development

- Overcoming barriers to participation
- Communications (MC/16/47, Section 2).

3.3 The Council in April 2016 recognised that some “modification may be required so as to acknowledge the broader work of the Team and developments in the wider Connexion” (MC/16/47, para. 3.1). This included the suggestion that “[t]he recommendation about the development of vocational conferences should be considered alongside the recommendations in the Larger than Circuit report (which the Council considered in January) about a review of the process by which Chairs of District are identified” (para. 3.2 (ii)).

#### 4.0 **Probationer studies and the first five years in ministry** [Ministries Committee]

4.1 In summer 2015, the Ministries Committee asked the Queen’s Foundation “to design and develop a programme for Ministerial Probation that integrates with pre-ordination training.” A year-long consultation raised a range of questions and issues and resulted in a series of recommendations. The Ministries Committee will bring proposals to the Council.

#### 5.0 **Continuing Development in Ministry (CDiM)** [Ministries Committee]

5.1 The meeting of the Ministries Committee in July 2016 received a paper that proposed a framework designed to fulfil the requirements for CDiM set out in SO 745. Following a discussion that noted the need for this area of work to be held together with other work on leadership and vocation, it was agreed that a revised paper would be discussed by the committee prior to a report being made to the Council.

#### 6.0 **Sabbaticals** [Ministries Committee]

6.1 M11 (2015) requested that the Ministries Committee undertake a review of sabbatical policy reporting back no later than the 2017 Conference. The 2016 Conference directed the Ministries Committee to note the views expressed by the Bradford North Circuit Meeting in M7 (2016) and to consider them alongside other perspectives expressed during the review.

6.2 Research has been undertaken with District Sabbaticals Officers, District Chairs, ministers and senior circuit stewards and an initial report made to the Ministries Committee in September 2016. A further report will be made in January 2017.

#### 7.0 **Leadership across Districts** [Larger Than Circuit]

7.1 Following the report of the Larger Than Circuit Coordinating Group to the 2016 Conference, the Conference adopted a number of resolutions that relate to leadership and vocation across Districts. A separate report is being made to the Council concerning progress on a number of these resolutions.

#### 8.0 **Church and circuit steward training** [Discipleship and Ministries]

8.1 Work has been undertaken within the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network to collate and review resources available for church and circuit steward training. This review led to the conclusion that there is a need for the educational foundation and aspirations to be more firmly established and for the formal elements of Methodist polity and ecclesiology to be carefully and rigorously represented as core elements of any training scheme.

8.2 A programme of vocational resources is in the process of being developed and piloted, drawing on existing resources and recognising the importance of effective lay leadership for the Methodist Church.

## 9.0 Reflections from the Stationing Advisory Committee [SAC]

- 9.1 The Stationing Advisory Committee (in its panels) each year meets a number of presbyters and deacons who seek the permission of SAC to explore opportunities for ministry other than a station in a Circuit. Members of SAC panels have noted that some ministers they meet are seeking a general conversation about the way ahead for their ministry and whilst members of SAC panels deem it an honour to be party to a minister's vocational exploration, they are conscious that that is not the express purpose of the panel and that there might be other ways in which this perceived need can better be met.
- 9.2 Some of these ways might emerge from supervision (when that is available to all presbyters and deacons in the active work) and/or ministerial development review (MDR). However, there can also be an advantage in such vocational conversations taking place away from the minister's own context. As such, the SAC (noting links with other areas of work described in this paper) has suggested that it would be helpful to explore how the Connexion might offer to its presbyters and deacons structured opportunities for reflection on their developing vocation, perhaps through either a 24- or 48-hour retreat with an experienced spiritual director or a programme of guided reflection and meetings over a period of time.

## 10.0 Reflections

- 10.1 In light of looking at these interrelated areas of work the group has reflected on the following points:
- a) Vocational questions permeate several areas of connexional life and work and are significant for the health and vitality of the Methodist Church.
  - b) For example: forming and developing disciples; growing vocations to a variety of ministries (lay and ordained); discernment and selection; initial ministerial training; stationing; ongoing ministerial formation and development – all of these areas have vocational elements within them.
  - c) Work on vocations is multi-dimensional and spread across the life of the Connexion and the work of the Connexional Team.
  - d) There are close links between the vocational development of individuals and communities and questions of (Methodist) identity – forming and shaping belief which can be articulated as a reason (or apologetic) for faith and forming and shaping a practical outworking of faith in life and work (a living ethic).
  - e) There is a need to develop a holistic and intentional approach to vocation and identity across the life of the Methodist Church and the Connexional Team.
  - f) Whilst ordained vocations are not the driver for work in this area it should be expected that sustained work on vocation will increase the number of candidates. There may be additional benefits in focusing work upon underrepresented groups within the Church (eg young vocations, ethnic minorities, women in senior leadership positions including superintendency).
  - g) There is comparative evidence emerging from other denominations, especially the Church of England and the Church of Scotland about the benefits of a strategic approach to vocations.

## 10.2 Recommendations to Consider

- a) **Encouraging Lay and Ordained Vocations** – the question of vocations is a key question for the Faith and Order Committee to explore in the report(s) on *Ministry in the Methodist Church*. In particular, the wider question of the ecology of ministries we seek to cultivate as a Church and their relationship to one another is fundamental to a strategy for vocations.
- b) **Communications, Marketing and Social Media** – initial evidence, especially from the Church of Scotland, seems to suggest that an intentional and targeted communications strategy is bearing some fruits, at the very least in stabilising numbers offering for ministry and perhaps also – although the evidence is less clear here – in generating increased numbers of candidates from diverse backgrounds. This suggests that a key component of any vocations work plan will focus on this area.
- c) **Intentional Community** - an interesting aspect of work in other denominations is the focus on intentional community for vocational exploration, especially amongst young people, in a blend of dispersed and gathered modes. There are a number of resemblances here to past Methodist practice (eg Foundation Training; the Cliff Year) which could be fruitfully explored alongside ecumenical models (eg the Community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace) as a Methodist model.
- d) **Partnerships** – a particular characteristic of the Church of England approach is the development of partnership with Anglican related agencies/charities. Whilst the Methodist context is very different, there are a number of natural contexts and partnerships within which vocation could be explored consistently over time (eg 3Generate; the ONE Programme; Connecting Disciples).
- e) **Connexional Structures** – because vocational work is spread across a variety of roles and tasks it would be beneficial to create a small working group from across the Connexion to co-ordinate an intentional approach to vocation and identity, stretching from discipleship development to ongoing development in vocation.
- f) **The Role of Districts** - a key context for vocations work seems to be in those structures which are located closer to the local context. This suggests an important role for districts in supporting vocational development.
- g) **Advocacy Networks** – the CofE and the Church of Scotland have developed a structure of advocacy champions. These structures work in diverse ways according to the needs of geography and of particular ‘target’ groups.
- h) **Diversity** – there are a number of references in Section G, Para. 2.3 of the Methodist Council report to the 2016 Conference which draw specific attention to vocations work with underrepresented groups. The particular needs of underrepresented groups whether defined in terms of age, gender and ethnicity or in broader terms (eg geography, tradition) is a recurring theme in the wider ecumenical context. This suggests that a particular work focus is required in this area.
- i) **Research** – it would be helpful to develop some consistent research themes focused on vocation, eg longitudinal studies of selection processes; analysis of district vocational trends; exploration of the diversity of candidates and the obstacles they perceive or experience in selection or stationing processes.

## 11.0 A Way Forward

- The working group believes that there would be considerable benefit to the wider Church in sustained, intentional work on the themes of vocation and identity over a period of at least five years. This would make a clear contribution to the growth, deepening and development of our life as the community of God's people.
- Whilst some of this work could be achieved through a refocusing of existing work plans across the team, there is a considerable amount of strategic and implementation work required in this area which requires a focus of responsibility and accountability.
- To this end the group is giving thought to the setting up of a 'unit' focused on vocations, overseen by a small oversight group so that all work in this area will be coordinated.
- Ideally such a 'unit' would be representative of three strands of ministry (lay; diaconal; presbyteral).

12.0 The SRC discussed these initial recommendations and strongly encouraged the group to take the work forward. The group was encouraged to produce a more detailed analysis, a work plan and a budget for the work.