Conference 2016

This is my personal report on the Methodist Conference 2016 held in London from 1st to 7th July. It is both my personal reflections on the event as well as details of the business. I have deliberately not included all the business as most in not directly relevant to us and further details are available from the Conference website, as well as from Darren Garfield, who also has details from the Presbyteral session, if required.

## Personal reflection

This Conference was held at Methodist Central Hall in the very centre of political and religious power in Britain. It is across the road from Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. During our time there, there were 3 demonstrations and the launch of the Chilcot report, which took place next door to Central Hall and was accompanied by a large demonstration and lots of police. On top of this we were all staying in student accommodation in Greenwich which is 30 to 45 minutes away by tube and DLR. As Paul Martin says, “what could possibly go wrong?”

This was my third Conference experience and in London we had a team that was not made up of long term Conference attendees, which is what we seem to see from some other Districts. We also had a relatively young team helped by Josh, on his second visit, and Leonie, a Conference virgin. We also had Darren in attendance as Synod secretary making his first Conference appearance since his ordination and Stephen without whom there would be no Conference as we know it.

This year there were two events outside of the normal work of the Conference. A workshop on Ministry led by the Faith and Order Committee who are looking into the whole area of Ministry in the Church, and a very good session on refugees. This was led by the President and vice President and was directly in support of their theme of the year encapsulated in their interpretation of Micah 6:8, *do justice, love kindness, walk humbly*.

Central Hall is a significant venue for Conference because it is a Church and for some that was very significant. However, the great hall, where we met, is relatively cramped for 306 representatives sitting at tables. Having said that we had good seats and the Wi-Fi was excellent allowing background research for the more esoteric items. It also allowed one of our number, no names[[1]](#footnote-1), to tweet regularly and at one point turn the Secretary of Conference, into the Stig after his comment on a motoring holiday.

Finally, I saw Conference differently this year. It no longer felt to be business with elements of worship but rather worship in which we did elements of business. I’m sure there is a theological discussion to be had on business and worship, but suffice to say that I came home feeling as if I had had a very worthwhile 5 days.

## Business

The following is a summary of the significant or interesting business of the Conference. Items where there is a direct impact on us in Bolton & Rochdale are in **bold**.

### Unified statement of Connexional finances (20)

This was a presentation of the overall finances showing funds as of 31st August 2015 of £185m. There were comments on the amounts held in reserve by some Churches and Circuits and also the reduction in spending from 2014 on helping the Church to engage with society

### Connexional Central Services Budget (27)

This presented the budget for the Connexional team and other expenditure and was set against an overall healthy financial position while accepting that 70% of Members are 66+. There was emphasis on the Connexional nature of the Church and one way this was seen was the Central support for Island Districts with their increased costs. There was an additional unknown factor in funding to support the Church in, what was then the Goddard child abuse enquiry.

**It was agreed to accept the recommendation of Methodist Council to increase the Methodist Church Fund assessment by a fixed amount of 1% per year for 3 years from 1st September 2017.**

### Methodist Council part 1 (3)

This was the first report of Council and contained two particularly relevant items.

**The revised charter for incoming and outgoing ministers was accepted and there is particularly good information in this on the condition of manses.**

**The recommendation from Council of better resourcing of Churches to effectively engage with the debate on the value of human life was adopted.**

### Mission alongside the poor in the 21st century (26)

This excellent report, well worth reading, looked at the MAPP program and consider how it should be updated, this include a change of name to Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ)

### Methodist Independent School Trust (12) and Methodist Homes (11)

Basic reports on both these organisations tackling some technical issues and well as bringing Conference up to date.

### Ecumenical report (10)

This is worth looking at simply to see the astonishing range of groups with which the Methodist Church has formal relations.

### Bible study and workshops

The Bible study was followed by workshops looking at Ministry in the Methodist Church as part of the work being carried out by Faith and Order.

### 3 Generate (22)

Excellent report on the activities of the youth assembly including a report from their events. However the most significant part of the report was the identification of a manifesto and themes with which the children and young people want to engage. There are in several areas with different emphasises depending on the age range (full report well worth reading) but including:

* Our Church – including question on worship, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and Methodism in general. Keeping your faith;
* Our community – including bullying, domestic violence, dying and helping others;
* Our world – including environmental concerns, where is God and issues surrounding war and terrorism. Climate change, Immigration and poverty
* Sex and relationships - including same sex marriage and sex within and outside marriage;
* Occult and paranormal;
* Israel and Palestine.

**Conference directs the Connexional Leaders Forum to consider how the these can be taken forward within Districts and report to Conference 2017.**

**Conference received the manifesto and directed Districts, Circuits and local Churches to engage with children and young people on these issues.**

### Allowance above stipend (6)

This report sought to rationalise some of the payments above stipend particularly to recognise issues in Scotland the islands. There are 10 specific recommendations but on the removal of 5% above stipend for synod secretaries and the discontinuation of all discretional allows above stipend of 10% or less are relevant directly to B&R.

### Connexional allowances committee (14)

**This report confirmed the main Connexional allowances including confirming a car travel rate of £0.45 per miles and a living wage of £9.40 in London and £8.25 elsewhere.**

**The report also reinstated the sabbatical levy of £50 per Minister in 2016/17 rising to £60 in 2017/18 until further notice. It also recommended the maximum amount of expenses that can be claimed during a sabbatical continues to be £1000 until September 2018.**

### Faith and Order (32)

Overall report of the work of the committee but including two relevant items.

**Feedback from Churches on the Issues of Connexionalism in 21st Century will be warmly welcomed. (para 3.2)**

**Para 5.4 has an extremely useful list of issues for consideration by local congregations on the impact of worship.**

### Future Conferences (8)

For the Conference junkies who like to plan ahead the dates are.

* 2017 22nd to 29th June in Birmingham
* 2018 28th June to 5th July venue to be confirmed
* 2019 27th June to 4th July in Birmingham

### Methodist Council part 2 (24)

The second report on the activities of the Council with the following particularly relevant items

* The appointment of a Connexional Vocations Officer to assist the implementation of the resourcing leadership focus
* The appointment of a property development committee to support effective use of property for mission. (Amended by NoM 104)
* Further research into the impact of Mapping a Way Forward.
* Resolving the maximum period between acceptance as a candidate and reception into full connexion should not normally exceed seven years.
* The reciprocal agreement with the URC has come to an end.

### Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group 36)

Joint presentation on the work of the group with excellent input form the Angelical Bishop of Liverpool who very clearly stated that lack of progress was down to foot dragging by the CoE. He quoted:

*The Church of England, loving God with a slight sense of superiority since 597*.

We were encouraged to remember how much is already fully permitted and were reminded by a Padre to the forces that there is already full interchangeability in action in the forces.

### Marriage and Relationship Task Group (29)

This was the detailed report of the marriage and relationship group (well worth reading) and took into account the feedback from the conversations across Districts; and so masterfully done in B&R. There were a variety of contributions to the debate including some interesting information on our changing understanding of sex and sexuality. However, at the heart of the report was the recommendation that was accepted to set up a new task group to update the 1992 report and revisit the definition of marriage. There was debate on the membership of the task group and a debate on NoM 108.

**Conference also encourages Circuits and Districts to use exiting resources and encourage the Methodist people to make space and time to engage in bible sturdy and spiritual literacy.**

### Methodist Minister Pension Scheme (31)

The report reviewed the finances of the scheme and made a total of 13 recommendations. The finance officer also noted that the Brexit shortfall was now up to £70m.

**Conference approved a change to CPI from RPI as the measure of the annual increase.**

### Larger than Circuit (15)

The report overall concluded that there was no appetite for radical structural change but did see a need to reflect on the changing role of the District Chair and how this can be supported. The report made 7 recommendations aimed at supporting District Chairs. These include

* Revising the role performed and the title
* Looking at the process of discernment and nurturing leaders
* Increasing ethic and gender balance
* Direct stationing
* Leadership training for Chairs
* A District Commission to oversee the appointment of a new Chair (This was amended by NoM 103).

### Theology and Ecclesiology of Diaconate (33)

A relatively complex report considering the place of the Diaconate as a Religious Order within the Methodist Church. There were some comments that Members of the Diaconate felt disconnected from the report and the wider Church and that there was some leap from the report to the recommendations. These recommended that Council consider and report to 2018 Conference:

1. Whether the Methodist Diaconate as a religious order should be open to lay and Presbyters, and:
2. Whether those ordained as Deacons should continue to be required to be Members of the religious order.

### Past Cases review (34)

This updated progress on the recommendations from the past case review report at 2015 Conference. Eight recommendations are regarded as complete and work is well advanced on the others. The discussion of the recommendation for the recording of pastoral visits raised a number of issues both practical and regrading implementation and there were concerns about the time and cost of the recommendation on supervision.

**Appendix A gives the questions required for the annual audit for chairs, superintendents and ministers in identified districts.**

**Appendix B gives the lists of those required to complete the leadership and foundation modules. (Amended by Nom 105)**

### Safeguarding report (30)

This was an update of the work being carried out and included recommendations on the training, hours and supervision of District Safeguarding Officers.

**The report also included a recommendation that Creating Safer Spaces training frequency should be increased to every 3 years. After discussion, it was agreed that the frequency would be every four years.**

Report from Presbyteral session (58)

The main item was a resolution for a statement to be sent to Government and read out in all Methodist Church. This was amended by NoMs 101 and 106 and agreed. The statement was made available to all by the Secretary of Conference

### Discussion on Conference accessibility

This discussion was led by the working party set up after last year’s Conference to discuss all issue surrounding accessibility of Conference, from dates and timing, to reports and their accessibility to the provision of crèche facilities.

### Law and Polity parts 1&2 (18 and 43)

Update on the riveting matters concerning changes in CPD and other updates including updated rules on reinstatement to full Connexion.

### World day of Prayer (37)

This considered a proposal to join with other Churches in a world day of prayer on 1st September. Maybe we can do in next year. Never let it be said B&R jumped the gun on issues.

### Reflection from the Secretary of Conference

This excellent 30 minutes is well worth viewing on the Conference website and re-emphasised the focus on a One Mission Church. He drew on this quotation

*Let us afresh, solemnly and heartily recognise the original purpose of Methodism, “to spread Scriptural holiness through the land”, and ever regard this as the first and great calling of the Methodist people, and especially of the Preachers.*

From the “Liverpool Minutes 1820”, CPD, Vol 1, Book V, Part 3, section I

## Reading and Watching

*To watch the Conference debates you can ‘Google’ the Methodist church website go to the Conference 2016 section and there you can watch the debates – streamed to your computer. You can also access all of the written reports to Conference; we suggest you read the:*

* Mission alongside the poor in the 21st century (26)
* 3 Generate (22)
* Marriage and Relationship Task Group (29)
* Past Cases review (34)

## The Presbyteral Session

This is a chance for the Presbyters to deal with specific business, we have a special service to Remember all of the Presbyters who have died in the previous year.

If anyone wants to ask detailed questions on the open business please ask Darren at Synod.

## Memorials to Conference

Memorials are notes to conference that ask for something to be done. They can come from Churches, Circuits or Districts. The list below shows the range of such Memorials and the area to which they relate in the Conference, unless they were being taken En bloc. The replies drafted by the Memorials committee are in the Memorials section of the agenda.

M1 Criteria for candidating for the ministry (24) Methodist Council part 2

M2 Itinerant ministry and stationing En bloc

M3 Questions asked in the Presbyteral Session of Synod En bloc

M4 The circuit reinvitation process En bloc

M5 Nurturing the vocation of supernumerary ministers (24) Methodist Council

M6 Nurturing the vocation of supernumerary ministers (24) Methodist Council

M7 Sabbaticals En bloc

M8 Advice and assistance regarding UK visas En bloc

M9 Support for ministers or their partners requiring care (14) Connexional Allowances

M10 Authorisations to preside at the Lord’s Supper (39) Authorisations Committee

M11 Secretaries of Local Preachers’ Meetings En bloc

M12 Secretaries of Local Preachers’ Meetings En bloc

M13 Recognition of local preachers En bloc

M14 Support for circuit stewards En bloc

M15 Circuit assessments (27) Budget

M16 Connexional budget (27) Budget

M17 Pension contributions from lay employees (31) Pensions

M18 Employer-only pension contributions for lay employees (31) Pensions

M19 Information on Connexional expenditure (27) Budget

M20 Transparency of information regarding Methodist charitable funds En bloc

M21 Accounting software (27) Budget

M22 Systems for recording safeguarding cases (30) Safeguarding Report

M23 Connexional requirements upon office holders En bloc

M24 Circuits in tragedy and crisis En bloc

M25 Order of service for baptisms (32) Faith and Order

M26 TMCP En bloc

M27 TMCP En bloc

M28 TMCP En bloc

M29 TMCP En bloc

M30 Governance of work requiring technical expertise En bloc

M31 Use of local church benevolence funds by deacons En bloc

M32 Use of church buildings by other churches (10) Ecumenical report

M33 Authorisation of same-sex marriage in LEPs (29) Marriage and Relationships

M34 Arms exports En bloc

M35 Support for refugees En bloc

M36 Support for refugees En bloc

M37 Benefit sanctions En bloc

M38 Cadbury En bloc

M39 Centenary of King's Hall Southall En bloc

## Notices of Motion

Notices of Motion are motions put forward at Conference to introduce a topic or change the proposed motions on the agenda. Again this list is simply to show the range of business covered by the Conference. Some of the significant NoM have been mentioned above and they are listed in the order in which they were considered.

Notice of Motion 2016/101: Amendment to Report from the Presbyteral Session

Notice of Motion 2016/102: Amended reply to M37 Concern at the Expansion of Benefit Sanctions

Notice of Motion 2016/103: To Amend Resolution 15/7 in the Larger Than Circuit Report

Notice of Motion 2016/104: Additional Resolution in Section H Report 24

Notice of Motion 2016/105: Report 34 – Implementation of the Past Cases Review

Notice of Motion 2016/106: Amendment to Notice of Motion 2016/101

Notice of Motion 2016/107: Amendment to M24

Notice of Motion 2016/108: Resolution 29/8a

Notice of Motion 2016/109: Past Cases Review Implementation Report

Notice of Motion 2016/110: To amend reply to M3 – Questions asked in the Presbyteral Session of the Synod

Notice of Motion 2016/201(P) After the Referendum: National Life

Notice of Motion 2016/202: DBS Checks

Notice of Motion 2016/203: Deployment and resourcing of ministry

Notice of Motion 2016/204: Building community cohesion throughout the UK.

Notice of Motion 2016/205: Prospects Ministry

Notice of Motion 2016/205: Prospects Ministry

Notice of Motion 2016/207: Fracking

Notice of Motion 2016/208: Evangelism and Church Growth

Notice of Motion 2016/209: Listening for the Voice of God

Notice of Motion 2016/210: Responding to the Chilcot Report

1. It was Josh. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)