

3. Methodist Council, part 1

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SECTION A GENERAL REPORT

The Methodist Council is charged under SO 211(2) with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps could be taken to make the work of the Church more effective, to give spiritual leadership to the Church and to report annually to the Conference, bringing to the notice of the Conference matters to which it believes the Conference ought to give urgent attention.

The full range of papers presented to the Council and the outcomes of the Council's deliberations on them are available on the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/council

The report to the Conference is presented in two parts, this one in Volume 1 of the Agenda and part two in Volume 2 of the Agenda.

These reports contain those items considered by the Council and not reported elsewhere in the Agenda.

1.1 Governance responsibilities

In accordance with its governance responsibilities, the Council:

- appointed connexional committees, trusts and representatives for the year 2022/2023;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed the Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel as Deputy Chair of the Mission Committee, and thereby to the Council in that capacity;
- received reports from a number of committees and trustee bodies;
- appointed the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group;
- approved the revised list of authorisations and delegations;
- received reports from the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) of the Council at each meeting;
- received reports at each meeting from the Connexional Team on how each objective is being supported;
- adopted an updated risk management policy and the corporate risk register;

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- appointed the Revd Howard J Stringer as a member of the Council for the connexional year 2022/2023;
- received a report from the Connexional Allowances Committee, and agreed to urge all Methodist employing bodies to implement the current Living Wage in line with previous Conference decisions;
- asked the President and Vice-President of the Conference to write a pastoral letter to supernumeraries reminding them of the grants available to those in acute financial need;
- urged all Methodist employing bodies to review their own response to the impact of cost of living issues on lay employees;
- under the terms of SO 315(2), recommended the extension of Deacon Ruth M Richey's appointment as Deputy Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order for a further period of one year from 1 September 2023;
- adopted policy criteria for which Ukrainian refugees entering the UK under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or the Ukraine Family Scheme may be permitted to occupy Methodist residential property;
- adopted the Modern Slavery Transparency Statement for 2022/2023, and delegated the approval of future Modern Slavery Transparency Statements to the Connexional Secretary;
- received the report of the Pension Fund valuation and ratified the completed actions;
- approved draft terms of reference for the Resourcing Committee;
- received a report concerning the scrutiny of the annual governance returns of Methodist entities;
- approved the revised Memorandum of Understanding with Methodist International Centre Ltd;
- approved the principle of selling 141 Meadow Grove, Dublin;
- adopted the interim vicarious liability claims policy;
- re-approved the Partnership Agreement with the Queen's Foundation with amendments;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed the Connexional Reconciliation Group;
- received a report concerning the Arthur Smith Trust, and agreed to release the capital from two small permanent endowments in line with the Charities Act;
- received a report of a review into the operation of Safeguarding Contracts, five years after their introduction;
- agreed to the provision of a President's Assistant in the Sheffield District for the connexional year 2023/2024.
- agreed to a change in the list of Global Partners invited to the 2023 Conference;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd David I H Hardman be

3. Methodist Council, part 1

stationed to the Connexional Team as Coordinator of the Methodist Liaison Office, Jerusalem for three years from 1 September 2023;

- under the terms of SO 315(2), recommended the extension of the Revd Matt Finch's appointment as Pioneering and Church Planting Officer for a period of five years from 1 September 2024.

1.2 Other business

The Council received annual reports from:

- the Property Development Committee;
- Southlands College.

***RESOLUTION

3/1. The Conference receives the General Report of the Council.

SECTION B

MEMORIAL M22 (2016): SYSTEMS FOR RECORDING SAFEGUARDING CASES

The 2016 Conference received the following memorial:

M22 Systems for recording safeguarding cases

In light of the revised guidance Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church, the Southend and Leigh (34/10) Circuit Meeting (Present: 43; Voting: unanimous) recommends and requests that the Methodist Church develops a secure connexional online system for safeguarding recording and reporting to ensure consistent and effective compliance with data protection legislation, and good practice. This system could be part of the Methodist online suite.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Southend and Leigh Circuit Meeting for highlighting the importance of storing the required safeguarding information and that this be in a secure and compliant environment.

The revised guidance Safeguarding Records: Joint Practice Guidance for Church of England and The Methodist Church should be followed across the Connexion and is available on the Church website at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1517149/Safeguarding%20recording%20guidance16%2012%2014.pdf>.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to oversee an investigation of the potential feasibility and cost of a system as described in the memorial and to report back no later than the 2018 Conference.

It was reported to the Council that, after thorough research and consultation with practitioners, a contract was signed with a provider so that a system as described in the memorial can be introduced. The Council therefore reports to the Conference that the work it requested is complete.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 3/2. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 3/3. The Conference adopts the Report as its further reply to Memorial M22 (2016).**

SECTION C

MEMORIAL M4 (2019): REVISION OF GUIDELINES IN RELATION TO SO 955

The 2019 Conference received the following memorial:

M4 Revision of guidelines in relation to Standing Order 955

The Manchester and Stockport District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 144; Voting: 141 for, 3 against) draws the Conference's attention to Standing Order 955, regarding payments from circuit model trust funds to the District Advance Fund and asks the Conference to note that, under sub-clause b(iii) "a contribution is not payable on any disposition completed within the last five years, so far as they are employed in or towards a replacement project and consent to the disposition has been granted under Section 93 on that basis."

The Synod further draws attention to the current practice whereby a contribution to the district advance fund is taken from the disposition until such time as a replacement purchase is given consent.

The Synod believes that the current practice is in conflict with the Standing Order and invites the Conference to instruct the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice to revise the guidance, such that contributions are

3. Methodist Council, part 1

not made to the District Advance Funds from dispositions made as part of a replacement project, until the five-year limit has been exceeded.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Manchester and Stockport District Synod for this memorial relating to Standing Order 955 and replacement project classification.

The Conference appreciates the reasons for the District raising these concerns. However, in practice it is not possible to exclude from the circuit model trust fund an unknown amount. In the case to which the memorial refers, the cost of a replacement manse was not known until a new manse had been found and this will be the same where the costs of a redevelopment are unknown until plans are finalised. It is also not possible to know at the point that proceeds of sale go into a circuit model trust fund whether a replacement project will definitely occur even if this is the initial intention or that the replacement project will be given district and connexional authority consent.

The Conference therefore refers the memorial to the Methodist Council to consider the policy issues raised and, if appropriate, to consult the Law and Polity Committee on any amendments to Standing Orders.

- 1 The Council was asked to consider the policy issues raised by the current application of the Circuit Model Trust Fund levy to funds earmarked for a replacement project.
- 2 For clarity, this is different from the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) levy that is taken on the proceeds of sale at the time of a sale of property. The Circuit Model Trust Fund levy is taken at each 31 August based on the balances held at TMCP on the Model Trust, ie any proceeds of sale that have not been spent on some other purpose would be sitting in TMCP at year end and the levy would be taken. This diminishes the amount of money that is available for the circuit to spend in future. If the circuit is deliberately holding on to monies for the purpose of funding a replacement project, taking the levy may jeopardise the affordability of that project.
- 3 Standing Order 955 is clear that the levy does not apply to replacement projects that have received 'consent'. This matches the current practice in relation to the levy.
- 4 The policy question is whether the current approach achieves the intended outcome, or whether a different policy would achieve a better outcome.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 5 Standing Order 955 is clearly designed to redistribute monies sitting in Circuit Model Trust Funds (CMTF) to District Advance Funds ie that is the policy. Sub-clause b(iii) is therefore an exception to the general policy, recognising that once funds are committed to a replacement project (committed because the project has consent) a levy should not fall due.
- 6 To apply an exception to replacement projects that do not have consent would fundamentally change the definition of what a replacement project is. Such a project would exist based on the Circuit confirming such a project existed, not because the project had met the criteria laid down by the Methodist Council (as required by Standing Order 973). This would fundamentally impact the operation of Standing Order 972 Contributions (to the Connexional Priority Fund) as proceeds of property sales intended for a replacement project would be exempt from the CPF levy as well as the CMTF levy.
- 7 The overall impact would be a reduction in funds available to Districts and the Connexional Priority Fund.
- 8 As an alternative approach to extending the exemptions from the levy, it should be noted that the levy does not disappear, it simply redistributes money from Circuits to Districts. It is within the gift of each District to use part of the levy it receives to offer support to Circuits that are developing replacement projects; ie levies taken could be simply returned if that were the will of the District in fulfilling the mission plans of both the District and the Circuit.
- 9 In conclusion:
 - The policy is working as designed.
 - The wider implications of amending the policy are significant and would impact the funding available for connexional and district priorities.
 - As an alternative solution, levy monies could be returned by Districts to circuit replacement projects once they are designated as replacement projects.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 3/4. **The Conference receives the Report.**
- 3/5. **The Conference adopts the Report as its further reply to Memorial M4 from the 2019 Conference.**

3. Methodist Council, part 1

SECTION D METHODIST SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

HEADLINES

- 1 By the time the Conference meets, the first International Methodist Schools Conference, entitled 'Transforming Lives', will have been held in April 2023. This is a joint venture between the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU) and the Methodist Schools Network to coincide with the 275th anniversary of the founding of Kingswood school. At the time of writing, over 250 people, some from every continent (except Antarctica!), are expected to be present in person, with others joining online. Our hope is that this will be the beginning of further cross continental support between Methodist Schools.
- 2 The Department for Education (DfE) has required the Methodist Church to form a second Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to support Methodist schools that become academies. This has created a large workload for Methodist Schools' staff but it is gratifying to report that they have more than risen to the occasion and made significant progress on this plan. The new MAT, to be known as Inspiring Lives Education Trust (ILET), will be up and running in the early autumn with between two and four schools. Broadly, ILET will serve schools in the South of England, as Epworth Education Trust (EET) serves the North. Both MATs will be open to non-faith schools and able to sponsor new schools in new areas. ILET expects to include a secondary school in its founding group of schools.
- 3 Together with the additions to MIST schools and the establishing of ILET, the number of schools will increase for the first time in decades and, in line with *Transforming Lives*, this increase will continue, over the next few years. The close working together of all our schools also continues to strengthen and our commitment to prioritise those in most need remains a key driver in our expanding work.
- 4 Following the ongoing success of the Anti-racist RE material, further changes in RE teaching are being accompanied by new resources developed through MAST, including new work focused on the Tolpuddle Martyrs.
- 5 The schools group has worked with members of the Connexional Team on initiatives to equip Methodist churches to develop positive working relationships with the community schools in their circuits, in line with the resolutions of the 2021 Transforming Lives report adopted by the Conference.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 6 We thank David Humphreys for his eight years as General Secretary of MIST. He has been deeply committed to all our schools working together and had led the planning on the International Schools Conference. We wish him well in retirement. His successor will be Judith Fenn.
- 7 Further details of the above and other information is included in the rest of the report.

MAST

8 Facts and Figures:

- There are currently 66 Methodist maintained schools under the oversight of the Methodist Council, educating approximately 15,000 children.
- 26 of our schools are solely Methodist and the rest are held in partnership, most commonly with the Church of England. All are in the Primary phase.
- About a half of our schools are in the North West of England (predominantly in the Districts of Lancashire and Bolton and Rochdale), with the rest scattered across England covering, in all, 40 different Local Authorities and 18 Dioceses
- Around 10% of our schools have become academies in non-Methodist groups; this requires a particular kind of MAST oversight to ensure that the academy chains are honouring the schools' Methodist tradition.
- In a development since last year, just under 10% of our schools are now in Methodist-based academy trusts
- In OFSTED terms, 89% of Methodist schools are currently judged good or outstanding
- In the Statutory Inspections of Anglican and Methodist Schools (known as SIAMS), all our schools are good or better. Amongst church schools across the country, this is a particularly good marker.

- 9 MAST is now into its fourth year of working as a fully established Methodist schools organisation. We have continued to develop along the pattern established during, and after, the pandemic – although we are a small team with limited resource this seems to be working well. At local level, relationships between MAST and our schools continue to strengthen, supported by the use of our leading headteachers as Regional Leaders in Education. Through regular contact, they are able to create good links with and between the Methodist schools in their areas and respond where particular needs or opportunities develop. Overlaying this is the national programme of webinar training for which MAST has developed a strong reputation. Originally conceived as a creative

3. Methodist Council, part 1

response to the limitations of Covid, the webinars have developed into a major plank of MAST's activity. Although 'live' attendance has dropped through the last year, as schools have returned to 'business as usual' there is continuing good take-up via the library of webinars built up on the Methodist Schools private YouTube channel. This means that the training is accessed when convenient or can be used as a stimulus in a full staff or governors meeting. A development to the webinar programme over the last year has been training for governors, which has drawn a large and appreciative attendance.

- 10 The distinctive ethos of MAST schools (which is a key focus for us as a Religious Provider) remains at the forefront of our work. Training in aspects of ethos is an important aspect of our webinar programme and our sessions on 'What is Methodism' and 'What does it mean to be a Methodist School?' are always popular. MAST is often asked to repeat these at school level, sometimes with a contextual slant such as developing work around John Fletcher and Mary Bosanquet in Telford. Inspection of the school's religious ethos is required under Law and delivered via a framework developed in conjunction with the Church of England under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS). Two particularly good examples of SIAMS over the last few months are Emmanuel (Sheffield District) and St Mark's (Bristol District) – these and all other SIAMS reports can be found here: <https://www.methodistschools.org.uk/about-us/siams-inspections>. A new SIAMS framework is being developed for introduction from September 2023 and this will become a training priority. This year, ethos training has focused on maintaining quality in Religious Education – an aspect of the curriculum to which Initial Teacher Training for the Primary sector can give little time; likewise, future priorities include collective worship and children's spirituality.
- 11 The world of Religious Education is developing apace. The National Council for Religious Education is promoting a move away from what is termed the 'World Religions paradigm' to a 'Religion and Worldviews' approach with two main drivers – first, to teach about religion in ways that recognise that religions are not monolithic systems, shaped around a Western (largely Protestant) picture of religious believing and, second, to open non-religious standpoints on life to the same scrutiny as religious views. As classrooms become increasingly secular, this is helpful – children cannot simply claim, 'I am not religious' as an opt out from thinking about life's great mysteries. All views are open to probing, exploration and challenge and the slogan, 'Linger longer. Dig deeper' applies to all. With regard to diversity, Methodists will warm both to increasing de-colonisation and to a development which allows for the recognition of wider Christian perspectives, including those of the Free Churches. However, there are some broader philosophical questions to be considered and MAST is working with the National Society in thinking these through. The Methodist Schools'

3. Methodist Council, part 1

'anti-racist Religious Education' initiative, developed on our behalf by REToday in collaboration with the Free Church Education Committee, is now reaching into about 2000 schools across England and Wales. MAST and RE Today are now developing a joint project around social justice and the Tolpuddle Martyrs which will relate both to the RE and History curricula.

- 12 From the beginning of the new school year in 2021, national authorities made it clear that it was 'business as usual'. Ofsted re-launched the full programme of inspections with an adjusted focus including looking at post-Covid recovery. A number of Methodist Schools have been inspected since and our profile remains largely the same. However, MAST's experience bears out the pattern developing across the country: the number of schools being judged 'outstanding' is much reduced and it now appears the top judgement is almost impossible to attain in an urban area and/or areas experiencing deprivation. This is unfortunate for Methodist Schools, whose location and mission intend to 'those who need us most'. Within the group we have schools doing exceptional work in very challenging situations; Ofsted is using the language of 'exceptionality' but, on the ground, this seems to translate into the language of 'perfection'.
- 13 All of the above is consistent with MAST's usual work. However, this year has seen a new and important development: in March 2022, the Department for Education approached the Methodist Church (alongside all other Faith Providers) and asked to see the Church's academisation strategy for all Methodist Schools. This was in the context of the Education White Paper, which was dropped during its passage through Parliament in the Autumn. The White Paper originally required all schools to join a strong academy family by 2030 (in reality 2027) and the Department needed assurance that there was a route for this for all schools – particularly schools of a religious character where the DfE is not solely in control. Although this pressure is now removed, MAST is nevertheless in a better position for having done this very significant piece of work as, regardless of legislation, this is now firmly the direction of travel for the DfE. This means that, although MAST is not requiring its schools to academise, schools which wish to, or are required to by others, now have the security of a high-quality academy route which has the approval of the Regional Directors nationally. It also gives Methodists the capacity to make greater progress on aspects of *Transforming Lives* (Methodist Conference 2021) as it offers a framework for more schools to be established in, embraced by, and supported within, the Methodist ethos.
- 14 After extensive negotiation, the Department for Education has given approval to a Methodist strategy which will have two trusts. The first remains The Epworth Educational Trust, already well established and highly regarded in the North West of England. The DfE now expects Epworth to expand to cover a wider

3. Methodist Council, part 1

geographical area by means of a lively hub structure; they are also encouraging Epworth to become a Mixed MAT – a multi-academy trust that can take in faith and community schools (as well as mixing Primary, Secondary and Special). However, the new, and exciting, development is the establishment of a second trust to work in a similar hub model across the southern part of the country. The first schools working to set this up are an exceptional Methodist/Anglican infant school and a remarkable multi-ethnic community comprehensive boys' school, so this will be a mixed MAT from the beginning. It is hoped that, so long as rapid progress can be made, the second trust will be fully open for business from September 2023. Although community schools that join our MAT do not become faith schools, we are finding that our trusts are attractive to schools outside the faith sector because of the longevity and dependability of our values. The second trust will be called 'Inspiring Lives Education Trust', which MAT feels reflects well the title and ambitions of the Conference paper of 2021.

Epworth Education Trust

15 Facts and Figures:

- There are currently six schools within the Epworth Education Trust (EET) all of which are primary schools.
- Four schools have nursery provision, two of which provide education for 2 year olds alongside provision for 3 year olds and 4 year olds.
- The schools are all solely Methodist Schools and based in the North West of England.
- There are approximately 1500 pupils on roll in the schools.
- There are 230 staff across the Trust.
- EET is commissioned to lead the Westleigh Start Well Family Centre in Wigan. Managing the support for the most vulnerable families and providing some of the safeguarding offer for approximately 25% of the 0-5s in Wigan.
- One school has a resourced provision for up to 15 pupils to provide an education for SEND pupils that are unable to access mainstream provision.
- Within the Trust, with the exception of the sponsored school, all schools are at least good.
- All schools are subject to a SIAMS and they are all judged good or better. Five of the schools have the highest grading of Outstanding/ Excellent.

- 16** The culture and ethos of the trust is strong and firmly embedded since the merger of Acorn Trust and Wesley Trust to establish Epworth Education Trust over 2 years ago. There is strong collaboration across our family of schools with staff in a range of roles sharing best practice and supporting each other both

3. Methodist Council, part 1

informally and formally through the established forums and networks. Within the trust we firmly believe that 'Every child is everybody's responsibility'. As a result, the Headteachers do all they can to not just ensure their own school and pupils flourish, but all schools and pupils across the trust.

- 17 The trust invests heavily in continued professional development (CPD) of all staff and this is recognised as a strength in the trust. A highlight of the CPD offered this year has been the Aspiring Senior Leaders course, a year-long leadership programme developed by the trust. During the course, staff explored the key aspects of school leadership, undertook a project and completed various tasks. The course was so successful that a number of the participants have already secured a promotion. We continue to explore the ways in which ensure we have the best possible staff teaching the children in our care. The trust conference in September 2022 was a huge success, as staff across the trust were able to come together for the first time. We plan to hold another conference in the autumn.
- 18 This year we have launched the Epworth Specialist Leaders (ESLs) initiative. Staff that excel in a particular subject or area of school life are able to utilise that strength to support all schools. The trust has established a rigorous recruitment and training program and are delighted to have 9 ESLs across the trust. This initiative has ensured that schools have access to highly skilled practitioners as they identify an area which could be strengthened; it has also enabled the trust to retain staff who may have sought additional promotion outside of the trust.
- 19 As a Trust, we have seen some changes in leadership across the Trust. There has been a new Headteacher at Rosehill (Gemma Yapp) following the retirement of the previous Headteacher and the acting Headteacher at Westleigh (Karen Chadwick) took up a substantive Headteacher post elsewhere as the Headteacher returned from maternity leave.
- 20 During the last twelve months we have seen a further increase in pupils known to have Special Educational Needs (SEND) across the Trust and we continue to be recognised as a place of strength for SEND provision. The resourced provision at Rosehill has increased its pupil numbers by 50%. Another school has been awarded the Inclusion Award as a result of the high quality provision in the school. They are now also considering a request to open a resourced provision at the school.
- 21 We believe that our inclusive ethos reflects our Methodist ethos and a commitment to go where we are needed most.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 22** Since joining the Trust Summerseat has made significant progress and is now providing a good quality of education to all pupils. The trust is immensely proud to celebrate the Headteacher, Julie Whittaker, who was awarded the Headteacher of the Year at the Manchester Evening News Awards, standing out against a large number of applicants from schools across Greater Manchester. This award reflects not just the improvements she has made in the school, but the strong ethos of the school she has created along with strong development of staff. We congratulate Julie on this incredible recognition but also reflect upon the outstanding impact our staff make across our schools, as they continue to relentlessly and passionately 'do all they can' for our pupils and for each other.
- 23** The pupils in the trust have benefited from the collaborative work with Edukids, in which schools sponsor children in Uganda to support their education. The schools have embraced the project and the staff in all schools have also committed to sponsoring an additional child. The project has enabled the pupils to embrace the notion of the world as their parish. EET was delighted that a member of staff, Sarah Taylor, was able to participate in a trip and visit the children sponsored across the trust. Sarah taught the children games and provided books and gifts given by the schools. The visit has strengthened the children's commitment to the project, as Sarah was able to share with them all the hands-on experience.
- 24** As a trust, we place a strong focus on our Christian ethos and supporting schools in the living out of their own Christian ethos, the schools are the church in action in the pastoral care and support they offer. Collective worship has continued to play a central role in the life of our schools and the school family recognise the importance of this time together. Pupils find worship acts as a guide in managing many of the situations they experience; the opportunity to explore the Christian faith helps them in grounding their own belief systems. Chaplains continue to play a pivotal role in this work providing a strong link and joined up working between our schools and the church.
- 25** In Spring 2022, in the run up to the release of the Schools White Paper, the Department of Education (DfE) sought MAST to produce a plan for all Methodist schools to fulfil their aspirations of a fully trust led sector. Whilst this plan was being developed the growth of EET was paused and this was only released late autumn. The MAST plan has led to EET being the trust for the North of England. Since September there has been considerable interest in the trust from both Methodist schools and community schools. We envisage a time of growth will now take place.

MIST

26 Facts and Figures:

- Most Methodist Independent Schools were established by groups of local Methodist communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century following Wesley's pioneering opening of Kingswood School in 1748 followed by Wesley's successors opening the Wesleyan Academy at Woodhouse Grove in 1812.
- In 1903 most of the schools were brought together by a common Trust Deed and under the ultimate control of the Board of Management for Methodist Schools (BOM). BOM was superseded by the Methodist Independent Schools Trust (MIST) in 2011.
- There are currently 18 independent schools linked in some way to MIST: Trust Schools (10), Associated Schools (3), Affiliated Schools (5) – two of the affiliated schools are overseas and linked to a Trust school (Kent College Dubai and Kent College West Cairo). A full list and details can be found on the website: www.methodistschools.org.uk
- MIST is directly responsible as Trustees for the ten Trust Schools and the General Secretary (CEO) of MIST is a Governor at the Associated Schools and one of the Affiliated Schools.
- There are over 10,000 pupils on roll in Methodist Independent Schools.
- Twelve of the schools have boarders as well as day pupils.
- Two of the schools are for children of nursery and primary age only, two have pupils from 11-18 only and the rest offer continuity of education from 3 to 18.
- All of the schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspection Service (ISI) which reports to OFSTED; all such inspections in the past year have confirmed very high standards in all the schools. Copies of independent school inspection reports are published on each school's website and at www.isi.net
- In academic year 2021/22, MIST Trust and Acquired schools provided over £5,150,000 in means-tested bursaries to help hundreds of children to attend the schools whose family circumstances would otherwise restrict access; these bursaries are funded by a mixture of funds raised from using school facilities out of term or school time and from diverting a proportion of the fees paid by all to support the costs of others. In addition, the Methodist Bursary Fund and associated funds made awards for Methodist families attending Methodist Independent Schools of over £150,000.

- 27 Last academic year and this, the schools have gradually returned to normal after the upheaval of the pandemic. School rolls have risen, full extra-curricular programmes have operated, and a wide range of local community activities and partnerships have recovered. That said, there are some lingering effects of Covid. Some of these are positive such as the improved use of technology in teaching

3. Methodist Council, part 1

and learning but others are much more challenging, notably the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff. Many schools are addressing these challenges with staff and pupil support groups, specific pastoral support programmes and use of counsellors; the role of chaplains in this process is useful too.

- 28** Since the last annual report, a new Head has taken up his post at Shebbear College (Charlie Jenkins) and new chaplains have started their positions at Woodhouse Grove (the Revd Rob Drost), Kent College Canterbury (the Revd Alison Walker), and Ashville College (Ms Catherine Frieze). The Revd Aubin de Gruchy (currently Chaplain at Truro School) has succeeded the Revd Dr Paul Glass as Pastoral Visitor following Paul's return to circuit ministry in September 2022.
- 29** Moorlands School (Leeds) and Lorenden School (near Faversham) both merged fully with MIST in the past year; so the Trust is growing and welcoming schools not of specifically Methodist foundation in keeping with one of the objectives of the Transforming Lives strategy. The ethos and values of these schools are closely aligned with those of MIST and for several years these schools had been governed by existing MIST schools, namely Woodhouse Grove (Moorlands) and Kent College Canterbury (Lorenden); they now have their own governing bodies reporting directly to MIST.
- 30** Another beneficial impact of the end of the pandemic has been the chance to meet together in person in again (strikes permitting). As well as routine meetings of Trustees, Chairs, Heads and Chaplains we have held our Annual Away Days at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine's. A major focus of one of these days was Equality, Diversity and Inclusion where we were joined by Bevan Powell from the Connexional Team as well as EDI specialists from Farrer & Co. The following day we were delighted to welcome the President of the Conference to preach at our annual service of dedication and later in the day, as well as hearing updates from MAST and the Epworth Education Trust, we discussed our Group Plan target to further increase means-tested bursary support for our schools. Meetings in person are supplemented by meetings over Zoom for Heads, Junior School Heads, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Chairs and Trustees; such meetings keep us connected without the need to travel but are no substitute for meeting together in person.
- 31** A significant change this year has been the move of the Methodist Schools office from Methodist Church House to offices in a building shared with the Free Church Federal Council in Tavistock Square. Thus, the office team can keep an eye on progress with the conversion of the new Methodist Church House nearby and look forward to being able to move to accommodation there in due course.
- 32** Despite the impact of the pandemic, MIST continues to make progress with elements of its Group Plan for 2020-25 in which we are committed to *developing*

a culture that encourages and enables collaboration, communication and co-operation between the schools and MIST. The plan seeks to deliver a financially sustainable, inclusive education that is focused strongly on both the individual and the community experience, shaped by Christian values. Specifically, progress continues to be made with collaboration opportunities between MIST, MAST and the Epworth Trust; the Methodist Schools International Conference will be held in April 2023; “SIAMS for MIST schools” is being piloted, known as SERVE¹; and ongoing consideration of ways in which MIST and the schools can support the objectives of the Transforming Lives report.

- 33** Methodist Independent Schools are determined to continue to provide an all-round education infused with a strong Christian ethos informed by their Methodist foundation in an era of political, economic and social scepticism, uncertainty and change. Methodist Independent Schools are committed to doing everything within their power to increase the number of bursaries available to enable the offer of places to as wide a cross section of the community as possible. Financial support provides life-changing opportunities for a number of pupils as schools partner with the Royal Springboard Foundation (www.royalspringboard.org.uk) and in schools with specific programmes such as The Leys’ “Gift of Education” and Woodhouse Grove’s commitment to the One In A Million Academy in Bradford. The likelihood of business rates relief being withdrawn, and the possibility of VAT being applied to school fees threatens to make them less, rather than more, affordable. In the meantime, MIST uses resources carefully to support schools in need of specific help and others that now feel confident to plan essential investment.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 3/6. The Conference receives the Report.**

SECTION E MEMBERSHIP OF THE MEMORIALS COMMITTEE

- 1.** The Memorials Committee is established by SO 138 and meets once year in late May to consider the memorials submitted by Circuits and Districts and to propose the replies which are to be put before the Conference. The current committee membership was revised in 2020 and comprises a number of representatives from key committees and regions.

¹ SERVE stands for: Spiritual, Ethos, Relationships & Values Education

3. Methodist Council, part 1

2. As the Mission Committee has been formed since the new membership of the Memorials Committee was established, the Council wishes to add a representative from the Mission Committee to the Memorials Committee.
3. The proposed amendment to SO 138 is shown below. The Council appointed a member of the Mission Committee to attend the Memorials Committee in May 2023 in a non-voting capacity.

***RESOLUTIONS

3/7. The Conference receives the Report.

3/8. The Conference amends SO 138 as follows:

(2) In addition to the convener appointed by the preceding Conference the committee shall consist of:

- (i) a former President or Vice-President, who shall chair the committee;
- (ii) the Secretary of the Conference and the assistant secretary of the Conference;
- (iii) the Connexional Secretary;
- (iv) the Conference officer for legal and constitutional practice;
- (v) the secretary of the Faith and Order Committee;
- (vi) a member of the Ministries Committee;
- (viA) a member of the Mission Committee;**
- (vii) a member of the Strategy and Resources Committee;
- (viii) one district Chair, two presbyters, one deacon, one synod secretary and two lay persons, each nominated by a district Policy Committee from a different stationing region, according to a rota.

Those appointed under heads (i), (vi), **(viA)**, (vii) and (viii) above shall normally serve for a period of three years. The President-Designate and Vice-President-Designate and the chair of the Business Committee shall attend, but without a vote.

SECTION F STANDING ORDER 111(3)

1. Standing Order 111(3) is in place for the times when a minister's marriage is breaking down. It currently reads:

The President shall be informed by the Chair of the District of every case of the breakdown of the marriage **or civil partnership** of a minister. The

3. Methodist Council, part 1

President shall annually appoint one or more persons to be responsible, on behalf of the President, for ensuring that arrangements are made for such pastoral and material help to be given as may be possible and appropriate in the circumstances, particularly to the *[. . .] spouse or [. . .] civil partner* and family of the minister.

2. The current process is as follows. The Conference Office is informed of the breakdown of a minister's marriage; this can be via letter or e-mail to the President from the District Chair, or via communication to the Secretary of the Conference. The spouse of a minister is then assigned a President's representative to provide support. In the case of the breakdown of a marriage where both parties are ministers, a President's representative should be assigned to each to provide pastoral care. Spouses are currently entitled to a half stipend to assist them. The policy is that a maximum of 50% of the annual stipend is paid from the Auxiliary (Special Purposes) Fund. The financial support required will be discussed with the representative. The Director of Finance and Resources is notified of a breakdown of the marriage and the request for payment of a half stipend.
3. As many societal factors have changed since the SO was introduced and as the Church's understanding of marriage has developed in that period, it was noted that, as it is currently worded, the Standing Order seems to be out of date. The Ministries Committee appointed a small working party to examine the process when a minister's marriage breaks down, to explore if and in what ways the Standing Order should be revised, and to report to the Council. The Council received the report of the working party at its meeting in March 2023, and noted the conclusions of the working party that there needs to be greater clarity around the whole process when a breakdown of a minister's marriage is first notified, especially when both parties are ministers. The group suggested that although it is appropriate to have the President notified in the cases, it would also be beneficial if there were a person involved who knew the parties involved, ideally from the local area. A President's Representative is needed but pastoral support provided in the area is valuable. The group felt there were specific areas that need greater consideration and clarity, particularly:
 - Practical needs: including financial support and housing;
 - Pastoral needs: with care being available to lay parties as well as the ordained;
 - Any additional support that may be required, such as if there are children/dependents involved;
 - Support for the local church/ congregation.It was also felt that further reflection needs to be given to the nature of what is the Church's responsibility and what the required level of financial support might be.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

4. The Council agreed that the Standing Order is out of date. It also recognised that there is now a variety of circumstances in which separating couples find themselves and therefore that it would be helpful for more detail to be offered to the Connexion on how these matters should be handled. However, the Council was not of a mind that any of that needs to be in a Standing Order.
5. The Council therefore recommends to the Conference that SO 111(3) is deleted. The Council also directed the small group to produce draft guidance to be included within CPD clearly to explain the process to be followed from the time that the District Chair is informed of the breakdown of a minister's marriage. The guidance should cover the following areas:
 - Practical support for the minister(s), spouse and the church community;
 - Pastoral support;
 - Financial arrangements (including detail on the arrangement to be made when both parties are ministers);
 - Availability of counselling;
 - the timelines within which help should be made available;
 - Safeguarding matters (dependents involved, mental health and wellbeing aspects, any links to discipline cases);
 - Supervision and support for the President's Representatives.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 3/9. **The Conference receives the Report.**
- 3/10. **The Conference revokes SO 111(3).**

SECTION G

RECONCILIATION AND MEDIATION TEAM AND POSITIVE WORKING TOGETHER

- 1 The three-year Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) Pilot Project which has been run in partnership with Place for Hope is due to come to an end in December 2023. This report reflects on the project and the Positive Working Together (PWT) work with Place for Hope and proposes a way forward from December 2023.

PWT Background

- 2 PWT originated from work undertaken by the Connexional Team in response to Memorial M28 from the Basingstoke Circuit presented the Conference of 2013 with proposals to tackle bullying and harassment across the Church.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

3 In 2015 Conference approved the PWT Guidelines for Promoting Good Working Relationships and Managing Conflict in the Church along with a funding package to implement these guidelines.

4 The key focuses of the work emerged from the resolutions agreed by the 2015 Conference:

40/2 The Conference directed that the Guidelines for promoting good working relationships and managing conflict within the Church be promoted in appropriate ways.

40/3 The Conference directed that each District appoints a suitable person to provide information but not advice about the options available to an individual experiencing bullying and harassment issues.

40/4 The Conference directed each District to ensure that its District Reconciliation Group receives annual training and appropriate support, so that it is equipped to deal with bullying and harassment issues should they arise.

40/5 The Conference directed that a sum of £65,000 be made available in the 2015/16 connexional year from the Fund for Training for the implementation of Positive Working Together, followed by £50,000 in 2016/2017 and £25,000 in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.

5 Since 2015 the following activity has taken place focused on the development of a number of key areas:

- Dedicated website pages containing resources and sign posting to sources of help - <http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/>
- The production of Positive Working Together: A Short Guide.
- A half day workshop for church councils, local church groups and circuits entitled Shared Commitments exploring good working relationships and effective ways of managing conflict within churches.
- The creation of PowerPoint slides for Synod presentations.
- In June 2016, a PWT conference was held at Cliff College attracting 70 delegates nominated by districts and largely drawn from District Reconciliation Groups.
- A survey of District Reconciliation Groups (DRGs) was undertaken. The survey revealed an extremely patchy picture with some districts supporting well-resourced groups and others offering extremely limited provision and in some cases none. There were also significant differences in the levels

3. Methodist Council, part 1

of 'competence' within groups with some DRGs including members with high levels of relevant experience and skill and others with relatively low levels. There was also a lack of understanding in a number of districts of the purpose of DRGs and this sometimes led to them being under-utilised.

- Partnership working was explored with BridgeBuilders and Place for Hope – a Scottish charity with close historical and organisational links to the Church of Scotland. Place for Hope was ultimately chosen as our preferred partner organisation.
 - In partnership with Place for Hope the following modules have been produced, along with the accompanying training for trainers, aimed at supporting the development of local churches and circuits:
 - Growing Through Change and Conflict – an introductory one-day module focused on conflict styles, understanding and transforming conflict.
 - Bullying and Harassment – a one day module exploring the dynamics of bullying and harassment and exploring ways of responding with dignity and respect.
 - Spirituality, Scripture and Conflict – a one day module aimed at deepening our understanding of the impact and wisdom of scripture in transforming conflict, and in transitioning through change.
 - Faith in Change and Conflict – Cliff Certificate – the development of a longer 6 day training programme which is offered as a core training resource for DRGs and the development of intermediate level skills in conflict mediation and transformation
 - Journeying through times of change and transition – a half day training course offering an introductory focus on the ways in which change and transition can be most effectively navigated within the local church context.
 - Leading in times of change and transition – 2 x 3.5hr online sessions. As we see great changes occurring, both inside our faith communities and in society, there is a growing need to better understand how to lead well through such times of change. This course is designed for those involved in leading congregations, communities and other groups through change, but is open to all.
 - Transforming Conflict in Ministry – a two-day course run over four consecutive weeks.
- 6 Since 2019 the Learning Network has funded the ongoing work and further development of PWT in partnership with Place for Hope as a core part of our work. These costs have been part of the 3-year funding agreement with Place for Hope for both PWT and RMT.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 7 Memorial M15 from the Birmingham Circuit was presented to the Conference in 2022 highlighting the ongoing need for additional work on promoting and embedding the culture change that PWT had envisaged. The memorial was adopted, and further work is currently underway to take forward the resolutions.
- 8 Anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy information has now been included within section 6.3.4 of the Safeguarding policy of The Methodist Church.
- 9 There are new Shared Commitments resources available on the PWT pages of The Methodist Church website enabling local churches to reproduce poster information and individual information cards for distribution to church members.
- 10 The Learning Network has established a regular pattern of delivery of the core training courses that are now available to anyone across the Connexion through online delivery. Alongside the online delivery a number of courses are held in person within the LN regions for local groups.
- 11 Work on *Positive Working Together* represents a considerable achievement for the Methodist Church. The key learning and development foundations have been put in place and provide an opportunity to widely embed the training and positively impact the culture of the Methodist Church and the ways in which it handles issues of conflict and bullying and harassment.
- 12 Further work is required to consider the most appropriate way for the PWT guidelines to be incorporated into Standing Orders as part of the ongoing review work of the Complaints and Discipline processes.
- 13 As highlighted by memorial M15 there is further work to be done to build on these strong foundations.

RMT Background

- 14 As work developed in support of PWT it became clear that there was opportunity to further develop the work of conflict transformation. Discussions took place with Place for Hope about how, and at what cost, a practitioner network might be developed to increase the capacity of the Methodist Church to respond creatively and professionally to conflict, change and transition through the provision of a trained, accredited and supervised team of mediators/facilitators. Place for Hope was already providing a similar service for the Church of Scotland. This work would enable a practitioner network that would be available to respond to significant areas of conflict in local churches, circuits and districts.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 15 It was recognised that there is a number of areas of church life in which a practitioner network would be beneficial and work continued developing the idea for a pilot project to enable this to be taken forward.
- 16 Place for Hope produced a project proposal detailing how such a network of practitioners could be established and maintained.
- 17 The RMT pilot project was set up in 2020 with agreement of the Senior Management Group of the Connexional Team.
- 18 The pilot project purpose, content and outcomes were agreed as follows:
- **Purpose**
Place for Hope will oversee a 3-year Reconciliation and Mediation Team Pilot Project (The RMT Project), to pilot the provision of coaching, mediation and facilitated conversations in three Learning Network regions of the Methodist Church, with a view to subsequent roll-out across the Connexion.
 - **RMT Project Content**
The support provided in the RMT Project will include, but not be confined to:
 - Practitioner Training and Support: Ensuring an adequate number of qualified, accredited, trained and supervised Practitioners to meet the need.
 - Coaching: 1:1 support for church leaders through times of change and conflict.
 - Mediation, or Facilitated Conversation: Support people and groups in churches through times of change, transition, or conflict.
 - Positive Working Together: support the continued roll out of training programmes offered through the PWT programme.
 - Other: Any other support required or requested by the Project Steering Group.
 - **RMT Project Outcomes**
Where there is unresolved conflict, churches often look inwards; where they are empowered to deal with change and conflict well, churches look outwards and are more effective missionally. The outcomes of the RMT Project are:
 - Greater understanding and analysis of conflict, its impact, and how it operates in church and faith communities.
 - Strengthened collective and strategic response to faith-based conflict.
 - Conflict, change and transition are navigated in more transformative ways with increased benefits and reduced negative impact.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- Increased understanding of the dynamics of conflict, brokenness and division leading to culture shift and recognition of the transformational potential of conflict.
 - Reduction in the number of formal complaints being made through the Complaints and Discipline procedure.
- 19** The project draws together different strands of existing and ongoing work within the Methodist Church. It builds on the work already undertaken in developing Positive Working Together, it recognises the need, highlighted by a number of District Chairs, to more effectively resource Districts by being able to offer professional reconciliation/mediation at an early stage in situations of dispute. It also links in with and will be able to inform the work currently being undertaken to review the Complaints and Discipline process.
- 20** In order to provide a suitable size and focus for the pilot project it was agreed that the project would be limited to three of the LN regions.
- 21** The regions selected were North West and Mann, London and East of England regions. This became the Eastern region following the merger of East of England and East Central region in 2020.
- 22** The rationale for choosing the pilot regions for the RMT project was that there was already a cohort of people who had been trained in the Faith in Change and Conflict pilot course and so enabled the initial training cohort to be drawn from those already trained, adding in formal assessment and accreditation with Scottish Mediation, and additional volunteers who were nominated by District Chairs and Learning & Development Coordinators in those initial 3 LN regions.
- 23** The pilot regions for the Faith in Change and Conflict course came from an open invitation to the LN Regions to participate in the pilot programme. A conversation was held with the District Chairs in the three LN regions before progressing with the pilot. The project was also presented to the District Chairs meeting explaining the rationale for choosing the three LN regions and associated districts to form the pilot.
- 24** The Reconciliation and Mediation Team is led by an RMT Project Manager employed by Place for Hope. They have been working closely with the training staff who deliver on Place for Hope's input to PWT. Support services have been provided through Place for Hope to the RMT Project Manager in the areas of finance, administration, line management, business development, client intake, secure data collection, evaluation and communications.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 25 A steering group was established to oversee the work of the pilot project with representatives from each of the pilot regions, Place for Hope and the Learning Network.

PWT/RMT funding agreement

- 26 A three-year PWT/RMT funding agreement is currently in place with the following breakdown of costs:

PWT	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
People costs	£20,889.18	£21,250.48	£21,619.05
Other costs including course materials	£9,147.30	£9,687.62	£7,279.76
Total PWT Costs	£30,486.48	£30,938.10	£28,898.81
RMT	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
People costs	£63,491.61	£64,032.77	£64,097.51
Training costs	£3,740.00	£5,890.00	£4,940.00
Office, equipment, supplies	£2,300.00	£440.00	£440.00
Practitioner accreditation, supervision and deployment	£2,873.50	£9,263.20	£10,944.00
Advertising, publicity, communication	£1,033.00	£33.00	£33.00
Administration and governance	£2,480.00	£2,480.00	£2,480.00
Total RMT Costs	£75,918.11	£82,138.97	£82,935.95

Reconciliation and Mediation Team review

- 27 Launched in July 2021, following a comprehensive 8-month planning period, the reconciliation and mediation service has now been fully operational for 19 months in 3 Learning Network regions: Eastern, London, and North West and Mann.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

28 A total of 20 practitioners were trained and assessed by Place for Hope and accredited through Scottish Mediation in 2021. 18 of these practitioners are now active. 12 individuals responded to the 2022 recruitment drive and 6 have been put forward for training and assessment.

29 Those involved in the project have developed a greater understanding of how conflict operates in faith communities and are sharing this with others as they use their mediation skills to help individuals and groups navigate conflict in more positive ways through the pilot project and their wider ministry.

“As a new practitioner, my ministry and personal life have been challenged and enriched by my encounters as a Mediator. I am more mindful that behind everyone’s interaction is a personal story, and often it takes time for that story to be realised not just by the group but also for the individuals involved. We are all very good at putting masks on and avoiding difficult interaction. One of the most valuable things is that we enable people to feel listened to.” (Deacon Debbie Harkness)

30 It was agreed with the steering group that three facilitated conversations would be offered in each pilot area in 2021-22, and again in 2022-23, to ensure a manageable demand and a limited waiting list. A significant increase of demand has been noted since the project service went live in 2021. It is clear there is a need for mediation. 34 cases have been processed by Place for Hope staff as part of the pilot project to date.

31 Mediation was completed on 11 cases, is ongoing in ten cases and one case is pending. This exceeds the pilot expectations. Two cases did not proceed past the enquiry stage and nine did not go ahead because one or more parties chose not to engage with this voluntary process. One party chose to submit a formal complaint. In Place for Hope’s experience this is not unusual when a service is launched, as long-term, high-level conflicts are often brought initially before the culture of how conflict is dealt with begins to change. Effort has been put into explaining the difference between this independent mediation service and Complaints and Discipline as some parties were looking for ‘justice’ and a party to be ‘blamed’.

32 Client feedback for cases that reached mediation, reveal that the service is meeting the project outcomes as practitioners create environments where people can navigate conflict in more positive ways, understanding of the ‘other’ increases and, in some cases, the formal complaints process is avoided. 83% of clients would highly recommend the service to others.

“The outcome was positive for everyone concerned; it certainly helped and brought a resolution for everyone. Plus, we avoided formal complaints!”
(Feedback from a two-party mediation)

3. Methodist Council, part 1

“It was very liberating for me to be able to say ‘I will refer this to a professional and impartial service but will not be dealing with it myself’ because I don’t have the skills needed. I see too many colleagues trying to sort problems out themselves and it can be so damaging.”
(Feedback from a two-party mediation)

33 Alongside the cases that have been progressed within the pilot regions Place for Hope have also engaged in a number of requests from districts outside of the three pilot regions. At present support has been offered to the following districts:

- Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury x 2
- Plymouth and Exeter x 2
- South East x 3
- Southampton
- Wales Synod Cymru
- Scotland

34 Reconciliation and mediation within Methodism

The pilot project has engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders across Methodism revealing the beginnings of a strengthened collective and strategic response to faith-based conflict. In addition to all relevant District Chairs, the conveners of District Reconciliation Groups and District Stewards, other key partnerships have advanced outcomes in new and complementary ways to the case work undertaken.

35 Complaints and Discipline

A strong, collaborative relationship has developed between the pilot project and Complaints and Discipline to ensure the sharing of information, expertise, and knowledge, and to manage the expectations of parties involved in cases.

‘The impact [. . .] has been very positive and enabled some complaints to be resolved without the need for parties to enter into the formal complaints process. [. . . It] has also provided a resource when there is a need for reconciliation/mediation after the formal complaints process has concluded. Overall, the project has enhanced the general life of the church and the service is very much needed.’
(Deacon Donna Ely, Complaints Worker)

36 Client feedback has explicitly shown that three cases prevented a formal complaint, however, there are not enough data yet to reveal a trend. What is evident is a dramatic rise in Methodist referrals to Place for Hope, a significant number of

high-conflict cases being brought forward, and the passion and commitment of the practitioners recruited through the pilot project to this aspect of their ministry.

37 Facilitated Coaching Conversations

Coaching was offered to the newly ordained in 2021. Focusing on managing change and transition, these conversations had a 100% recommendation rate and 100% of participants indicated they would like to attend Positive Working Together courses. 50% of participants said they felt more confident dealing with conflict in their ministry, with the other 50% saying they 'maybe' felt more confident. An increased understanding of conflict was evident, and participants indicated they would approach conflict in more transformative ways, with one participant saying they realised that avoiding conflict by moving was not a sustainable solution:

"It made me see it is important to deal with it even if I know I'll be leaving, because I'll take it with me. I need to be released [from the conflict] to enable my future ministry."

The impact of one of these conversations was that a presbyter recommended the service to a friend in difficulty, who then asked their District Chair to refer the conflict they are involved in to Place for Hope after their own facilitated coaching conversation. It is currently being mediated.

38 Through the pilot project Place for Hope was invited to:

- Deliver workshops at the Superintendents' Conferences and 3Generate, as well as an online session for the Transformational Leadership teams
 - Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with participants commenting on the expertise of those delivering the workshop and the valuable tools shared for assessing conflict. Speed Leas' Levels of Conflict was a standout for many and enabled participants to reflect on current situations: "The five stages were extremely helpful. Helped me realise I had done all I could to prevent a situation escalating - and now realise an individual is just intent on causing conflict." People also reflected on learning "how to handle a difficult situation so you don't become part of the problem [and] understanding the potential different stages of conflict and how to deal with them."
 - Feedback revealed a significant interest in the topic and a desire for longer workshops and more in-depth exploration of conflict in church situations with participants inspired to take further courses, "it was stimulating and prompted me to want to do more training" and revisit material from ones they had already taken, "I need to revisit the material from when I did Bridgebuilders."

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- Support the Discrimination and Abuse Response Service (DARS) pilot as part of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity programme

39 Challenges to the pilot project

- Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic: restrictions on in person delivery of training and casework; practitioner and client illness; travel anxiety; lengthy waiting list in 2021
- Referrer expectations
- Implications of stationing on practitioner availability

40 Despite several challenges faced in the first year of the pilot due to the pandemic, there has been an increased demand, satisfaction and requests for complimentary support in the form of training, coaching and integration of reconciliation and conflict transformation into a wide range of Methodist work.

41 Overall, it is pleasing to see at this point in the pilot that the Reconciliation and Mediation Team project is already exceeding its target number of cases, and that with its integrated approach, the support of key regional personnel, and alongside the work of Positive Working Together, is already achieving the outcomes that were envisioned for the project and which enable and embed a transformative approach to faith-based conflict in the three regions of the Methodist Church in Britain.

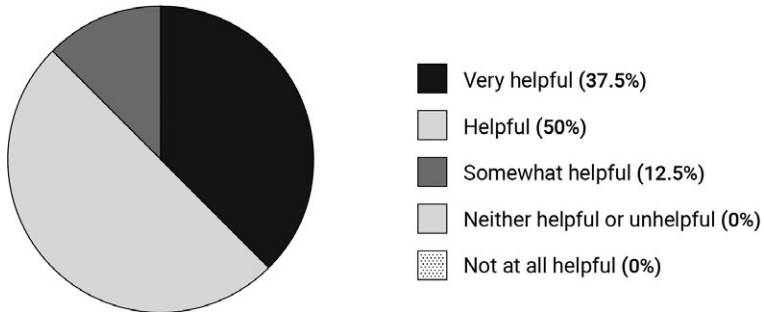
42 The following project outcomes have already been achieved and/or the groundwork has been laid for them to be achieved:

- Greater understanding and analysis of conflict, its impact, and how it operates in church and faith communities.
- Conflict, change and transition are navigated in more transformative ways with increased benefits and reduced negative impact.
- Increased understanding of the dynamics of conflict, brokenness and division leading to culture shift and recognition of the transformational potential of conflict.
- Reduction in the number of formal complaints being made through the Complaints and Discipline procedure.

43 Feedback from a recent survey undertaken in early 2023 with the current District Chairs in the pilot regions alongside feedback from previous District Chairs involved over the life of the project provided the following feedback on the project.

44 In your opinion, how helpful is it to have a reconciliation and mediation service available to your District?
Data received from eight respondents.

3. Methodist Council, part 1



- 45** Would you recommend the reconciliation and mediation service to others?
Data received from six respondents. Only six respondents answered the question as to whether they would recommend the service. Of these five would recommend it and one would not.

Follow up conversations took place to work on addressing the concerns raised about the project and how these can be minimised for future development of the work.

- 46** How has the mediation service benefited work around change and conflict in your District?

“Hard to say as this work is still in progress. Having an independent reconciliation team involved in a situation has enabled all to be held in a safe space which in itself has been healing.”

“Provided a reliable resource to offer to people and churches facing relationship difficulties.”

“In one case a good resolution by an external mediator helped one presbyter stay out of a complaint process.”

“Greater awareness of alternative approaches to handling conflict other than complaints.”

- 47** General comments

“I was hugely enthusiastic initially, but two recent experiences have led to a significant loss of trust and confidence in the project.”

3. Methodist Council, part 1

(As in section 45 of the report follow up conversations took place to address the concerns raised, which led to a strengthening of processes within the project)

“It’s still difficult getting people to engage with mediation before the conflict gets too big to deal with.” (This has been addressed by ongoing communication initiatives and collaboration with PWT)

“I hope the pilot proves successful and the scheme becomes permanent so that it is available when needed. I am confident that the need for reconciliation and mediation will only increase in future.”

“This has service has made a useful and positive contribution to dealing with conflict in the District. It has provided another avenue of intervention which has been both professional and reassuring. That it has offered independent expertise has been particularly useful.”

“The quick response and conversation was really helpful.”

- 48** Concerns raised by District Chairs throughout the pilot phase of the project have been helpful and have been dealt with promptly and a collaborative approach has been taken to seek appropriate solutions that have strengthened the project and its impact.

One area of learning from the pilot project is the importance of the engagement of District Chairs particularly through the advisory function of the steering group and this would continue and be extended if further development of the RMT is recommended.

Proposed way forward – building on a strong foundation

- 49** The Methodist Church in Britain has invested considerably in the RMT pilot as well as the ongoing PWT programme with the view of embedding a culture of peace and reconciliation and minimising the risk of bullying and harassment. Having made this investment over a number of years we see an even stronger future ahead built on this firm foundation with a vision for an integrated programme.

- 50** A vision for a fully integrated RMT and PWT:

“Do not allow yourself one thought of separating from your brothers and sisters, whether their opinions agree with yours or not.” John Wesley

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 51** Having reviewed the ongoing work needed to further embed PWT and build on the RMT pilot project, the way in which the two areas of work interlink has become very clear. There are a number of aspects of our work where PWT and RMT continue to offer significant benefits. The following proposed way forward comes from conversations in partnership with Place for Hope based on an integration of these two areas of work.
- 52** Since 2016, Place for Hope has worked in partnership with the Methodist Church in Britain through the development of the Positive Working Together (PWT) and a team of trainers from the Learning Network, and a number of volunteers, to support individuals and congregations to grow in their understanding of conflict, live well with difference, and help them to realise their potential as peacemakers. In 2020, the PWT partnership was augmented by the Reconciliation and Mediation Team (RMT) Pilot Project in three Learning Network Regions; Eastern, London and North West and Mann, designed to trial the impact of provision of mediation, facilitated conversation and coaching support through a team of trained and accredited mediators from the Methodist Church.
- 53** It has been pleasing to witness the increasing synergy between the two workstreams of PWT and RMT funded under the current Grant Agreement over the past two years and their combined positive impact for individuals, ministries and communities. Alongside the development of the pilot RMT project, the PWT programme itself entered a new phase of embedding conflict transformation and reconciliation across the Methodist Church in Britain for 2023. The first phase of PWT focused on equipping the Learning Network to deliver specific foundational courses across the Church and has now reached the point that the training of trainers for these courses could become the responsibility of the Learning Network, freeing the focus of PWT to move to developing the next suite of specialised train the trainer programmes/workshops on specific topics addressing identified needs (eg conducting congregational discussions on potentially polarising topics, leading through change and transition, and resources that enable the embedding of skills, understanding and confidence in conflict transformation more widely in the lives and communities of all in the Methodist Church).
- 54** As detailed discussions take place about rolling out the training of RMT mediators and the availability of mediation for churches throughout the Connexion, we envision the benefits of a fully-integrated Joint programme going forward in which the two workstreams of RMT and PWT complement and build on one another under a single programme, through which all requests for support – for mediation, facilitated conversations, coaching or training – can be responded to by drawing on the full team of Place for Hope as well as the growing RMT and PWT networks in the Methodist Church.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

55 This fully integrated programme would be the natural and exciting next step in working positively towards a culture shift in our churches that sees conflict as normal part of diverse communities which can serve as a window through which we can deepen our relationships, community and faith, when a transformative approach is taken. An integrated joint programme would enable the Methodist Church and Place for Hope to increasingly release the spirit of faith-based conflict transformation and the ministry of reconciliation (FBCTR) in the culture, systems, mission, and ministry of the Methodist Church at both grassroots and systemic levels.

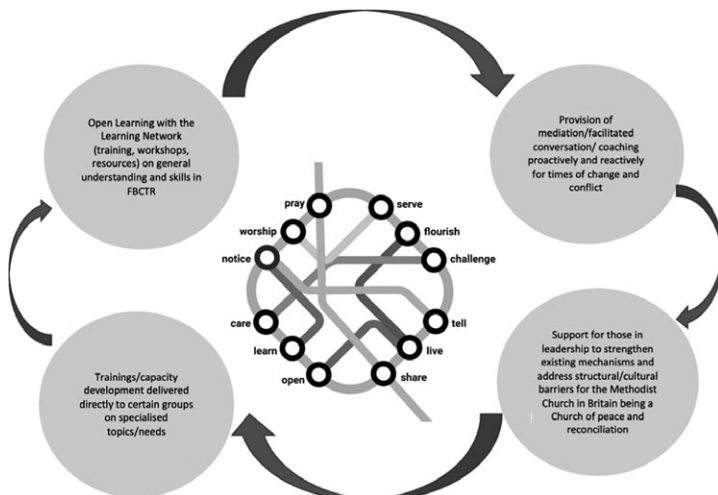
56 Embedding Peace and Reconciliation:

- In denominations and churches there is often the assumption that people have a basic understanding of peace and reconciliation through other faith (Bible reading/study, worship, service etc) and life experience, and discipleship learning and development opportunities. This is usually far from the case, and many may well struggle to understand the importance of peace and reconciliation in their Christian life and how to apply it in their own ministry, mission and personal lives (if such a distinction holds), and how it can underpin our approach to everyday issues of justice, inclusion, the environment as well as personal, community and professional relationships. The depth and extent of the knowledge required to live as people of peace and reconciliation will vary according to their discipleship journey and their ministries.
- The joint programme's integrated approach would support the Methodist Church in Britain to:
 - Strengthen their support of those serving in ministry – lay or ordained – to navigate change, difference and conflict well;
 - Help release the spirit of conflict transformation and the ministry of reconciliation for all in the relationships, culture and systems of the Methodist Church.
 - Support Districts to enable enthusiastic, worshipping, serving, witnessing, nurturing congregations to fulfil their mission and ministry for their context.
- The joint programme would enable these objectives through the offering of a package of vocational training and support aimed at the growth of skills and processes of addressing difference, change and conflict in individual and group discipleship journeys from the grassroots to more systemic levels of the Church (including providing the best combination of support for each situation):
 - a. Training and ongoing coaching, in collaboration with and mostly through the Learning Network on how an understanding of conflict

3. Methodist Council, part 1

transformation and reconciliation and associated skills can be a lens and way of strengthening all 12 aspects of the Methodist Way of Life. Further training would be tailored for the needs of a specific church, Circuit and District with a journey approach of starting where people are at and accompanying them on that journey of understanding, skills and confidence in FBCTR.

- b. Specific training and support may also be provided directly under the Joint programme for specific ministries, groups and events such as Superintendents, District Reconciliation Groups, JDS, 3Generate and others on specific topics of change and conflict that strengthen their ministry and purpose.
- c. Responding to requests for support through facilitation and mediation in situations of conflict and change which involve or affect the Methodist Church in Britain and all who make up the Church. This may include facilitation and provision for individuals, churches, Circuits, Districts Council and Conference.
- d. Such other training and support in the area of faith-based conflict transformation, reconciliation and peace-making as may from time to time be agreed between the parties, particularly those aimed at strengthening the existing mechanisms and addressing the barriers to the Methodist Church in Britain growing as a church of peace and reconciliation.



3. Methodist Council, part 1

Key principles of an integrated approach in the joint programme

57 Growing Internal Capacity for Faith-based Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation (FBCTR)

The joint programme would continue to strengthen the internal capacity for FBCTR by working closely with the Learning Network to deliver an extended range of trainings, particularly focused on grassroots embedding of FBCTR and developing specific training modules that speak to specific specialised needs of certain groups within the Methodist Church, such as Circuit Superintendents, DRGs etc. Through the training and support of a team of Mediation Practitioners, the programme also grows an internal group of specialists for conflict that has elevated beyond the local capacity to address.

58 Emphasis on case studies and practical examples

Moving people from being aware of their calling to be a peacemaker and to the ministry of reconciliation to actively applying it relies on their having a clear picture of what FBCTR looks like when applied in their ministry and mission. There is a need to systematically collect and utilise relevant case studies from the Methodist Church and other Christian denominations on an ongoing basis. These will form a key part of training programmes and ongoing communications within and external to the Church.

59 Emphasis on a journey approach and reflective learning

The design of training, both existing and new will take into account the current knowledge base of participants and the contexts in which they live and minister. This means that training and resources are targeted based on the roles, and current levels of awareness in a specific Church, Circuit and District and ability to apply FBCTR and are practical for the challenges they encounter. A reflective learning approach will be employed throughout to review and build on participants' understanding and practice of FBCTR. In essence: What have they learned/done? What would they do differently? What do they need to know/access to improve their practice as they journey as a disciple of Jesus?

60 A 'twin track' approach

Broadly, this refers to the design and implementation of:

- i) Faith-based conflict transformation and reconciliation specific training and communications where appropriate; and

- ii) Including faith-based conflict transformation elements in other learning and development programmes run in the Church, particularly those that support the 12 aspects of the Methodist Way of Life and cross-cutting initiatives such as the Discrimination and Abuse Response Service (DARS).

61 Ensuring supporting resources and systems are in place

One-off training alone rarely leads to long term changes in the behaviours and practices of participants. It is critical that other factors within the Church are in place to support ongoing learning and applications. This includes ensuring appropriate resources, policies and practice, and conflict coaching support are readily available. It also emphasises the need for visible cultural support for faith-based conflict transformation. Access to Place for Hope for timely technical assistance in the form of mediation/facilitated conversation/coaching is also crucial in situations when conflict has escalated to require an external party to resolve an issue and reconcile parties.

Conclusion

- 62 In enabling the integrated PWT and RMT work to progress it is recommended that a 5-year funding programme is agreed.
- 63 The time frame of 5 years allows the approach to start to embed peace and reconciliation throughout the Church, through both the ongoing systematic building of capacity, the full roll-out of the RMT across all the regions and retaining the ability to respond flexibly to ad-hoc opportunities and needs that arise.
- 64 The 5-year time frame see the capacity development approach gradually build up the understanding and skills for peace, conflict transformation and reconciliation (across key ministry groups as well as more generally across the church). The grant amount and plan each year will retain flexibility to adapt and respond to changing and arising needs, which will be monitored discussed and agreed by the Steering Committee in their quarterly meetings.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

65 Costs for a 5-year programme:

	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	Total Funding
Ongoing funding for PWT	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£150,000
Funding for extending the RMT connexion-wide	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000	£600,000
Integrated funding for PWT/RMT	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£750,000

This integrated figure is based on a staggered roll out of the RMT so as to enable the RMT to be successfully established across the Connexion. As shown above, this integrated cost includes the ongoing costs of the development of PWT.

Additional considerations

- 66** If the decision is to end the pilot with no further extension of the RMT then the following areas will need to be considered:
- i. How we most appropriately support the ongoing need and provision of mediation, facilitated conversation and coaching in times of conflict and change.
 - ii. Resourcing costs for providing external mediation as part of the Complaints and Discipline processes and in support of the Discrimination and Abuse Response Service (DARS).
 - iii. The ongoing specialised support required for those already trained and accredited as mediators to retain their accreditation.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 3/11. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 3/12. The Conference adopts the recommendation for the 5-year programme, in partnership with Place for Hope, to offer the integrated approach in support of Positive Working Together and extending the Reconciliation and Mediation Team as a Connexion-wide programme.**
- 3/13. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to recommend and approve a revised steering group for the work going forward with appropriate representation from:**
- I. Place for Hope**
 - II. Chairs of District**
 - III. The Connexional Team**

SECTION H

REVIEW OF PART 11 OF STANDING ORDERS

1. In 2019, the Conference committed to undertaking a review of Part 11 of Standing Orders, having adopted Notice of Motion 2019/202 which stated:

Reviewing Part 11 of Standing Orders: In the light of the significant changes, both in UK society and for the Methodist Church of Great Britain since our Standing Orders regarding complaints and discipline were drawn up, the Conference directs the Methodist Council to set the terms of reference for, and facilitate the work of a thorough review of Part 11 of our Standing Orders. This review should include and address how processes of Safeguarding, Complaints and Discipline, and Connexional Team Grievances, can best relate to each other.

The Conference seeks a set of processes that are able to be enacted in timescales that are fair for all concerned and that are appropriate to the capacity, resources and size of the Methodist Church of Great Britain as it is today.

2. The Council agreed the terms of reference for the Review in October 2019. However, staff changes and the disruption caused by COVID-19 from March 2020 onwards delayed the start of intense work on the Review.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

3. The Church's subsequent participation in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in 2020 also highlighted a need to re-examine the working of our complaints and discipline processes, which was partly criticised in evidence given to the Inquiry and reproduced in IICSA's interim report on religious organisations and settings in September 2021.
4. The former Interim General Counsel in the Connexional Team took responsibility for the work in 2020. After initial consultation in December 2020 to obtain input from a wide cross-section of people across the Church, a stakeholder event was held in January 2021, which helped to clarify and provide focus on the specific issues that needed to be addressed. Once these had been identified, the project progressed through work-streams, each of which had the task of looking at a particular aspect of the Review.
5. A report was prepared in October 2021 detailing the work undertaken by the workstreams, and offering suggestions for improvements to the Part 11 process. The report highlighted some notable positives.
6. The report noted firstly that progress in improving the process has already been made. The *Place for Hope* mediation pilot has aided early resolution of complaints at local level before they escalate disproportionately and there has been improved communication and co-ordination between those handling safeguarding matters and those handling complaints and discipline matters.
7. The report also argued that the process largely works well, but needs refinement. Opinions are divided between those who consider that Part 11 should simply be replaced, and those who think that Part 11 actually works quite well in practice but needs some refinement. The report concluded that the current Part 11 process should be retained, but made to work better.
8. The report outlined a number of areas to which attention needed to be given if the processes were to work better including:
 - 8.1 The need for a clear distinction between what is a "complaint" and what might be classed as a "grievance", and for clarification of the different processes for dealing with them.
 - 8.2 The need for the early (or earlier) resolution of complaints and for an initial 'triage system' to assess each complaint and how best it can be resolved (eg be referring to mediation or local reconciliation rather than initiating the formal complaints process), with the aim of avoiding unnecessary escalation.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 8.3 The need to review roles (eg, the appropriateness of the Local Complaints Officer (LCO) role being held by Circuit Superintendents and District Chairs)
 - 8.4 The possibility of ways to streamline the current process to reduce delays and perceived complexity (eg by reducing the number of levels within the disciplinary process and/or fast tracking some cases straight to the disciplinary stage).
 - 8.5 The need to take into account IICSA's recommendations, particularly the desire for transparency in the investigation of complaints.
 - 8.6 The possibility of entering into agreements with other denominations to determine each other's complaints, or establishing an "Ecumenical Ombudsman" to maintain impartiality and objectivity when assessing complaints.
 - 8.7 The need to review the types of sanction that can be imposed and how they can be enforced.
 - 8.8 The need to review the terminology used in the process (which is perceived to be legalistic and not user-friendly).
 - 8.9 The need for detailed work to align the Part 11 process with the Church's Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) strategy as it was adopted at the 2021 Conference.
 - 8.10 The importance of ensuring care for survivors of abuse.
 - 8.11 The need for regular, obligatory training for all involved in managing the process.
 - 8.12 Noting that the current process relies heavily on volunteers (and recognising delays caused by volunteers' lack of availability), the need to review the resources available to manage the process.
 - 8.13 The need to consider enabling complaints panels to meet online rather than in person by default (as meetings can be convened more quickly if held online), and consider other ways in which technology can be used to support the overall process, integrating practices that were adopted out of necessity during lockdown.
9. The report was considered by the Complaints and Discipline Sub-committee of the Law and Polity Committee in November 2021, which concluded that more work was required and referred the report to a small group for further consideration. The small group met once and concluded there was too much outstanding to enable a full report to be produced for the 2022 Conference and that it would be confusing to share the report more widely as it was. The Council was therefore informed that more work was needed and reported to the 2022 Conference that the Review would benefit from a further year's work, not least because:
- 9.1 Not all the workstreams had reported and it was hoped there might be further material to be incorporated into the final document.

3. Methodist Council, part 1

- 9.2 IICSA's final report was expected to be published in Autumn 2022 and, bearing in mind the criticism in IICSA's interim report, it was appropriate to wait to see whether IICSA made further recommendations about how the complaints of victims/survivors are addressed in Church processes.
- 9.3 The 2021 Conference adopted the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) and more work was needed to integrate the recommendations in that strategy into a proposed revision of Part 11.
10. The Council also indicated its intention to bring a full report on the Review to the 2023 Conference, with recommendations on improvements and changes to the process.
11. There has also been a number of Memorials which the Conference has referred to those responsible for this review, namely:
 - 11.1 M28, M29 (2019) – Streamlining Discipline Processes with regard to Safeguarding Panel Outcomes following Risk Assessments
 - 11.2 M21 (2021) – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
 - 11.3 M15 (2022) – “Positive Working Together”
 - 11.4 M20 (2022) – Safeguarding
12. A number of other factors have demanded consideration in relation to this area of work, namely:
 - 12.1 IICSA's final report was published in October 2022, containing 20 recommendations. HM Government is yet to respond to these and any implications (eg around mandatory reporting) would need to be taken into account in the review.
 - 12.2 A number of difficult cases has served to highlight issues around the effect and operation of SO 013 (Suspension) in both the Safeguarding and the Part 11 processes.
 - 12.3 The 2022 Conference adopted the Commitments and Expectations under the Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers. The language of “expectation” carries with it the possibility of implications for the Church's disciplinary processes, if and when it is alleged that those expectations have not been met and raises the question of how, therefore, should the Commitments and Expectations be treated under Part 11.
13. The Secretary of the Conference sought the guidance of the Law and Polity Committee in October 2022 regarding how to progress the work that was still required. The Committee identified the need to appoint an external consultant to advise on the process, following which a detailed scoping paper was prepared and a specially-convened scoping group met on 24 January 2023 to agree the

way forward.

14. The scoping group agreed that approximately another 12 months' work was required, and endorsed the Law and Polity Committee's proposal that an external consultant be appointed. The Complaints and Discipline Sub-committee met on 30 January 2023 and also endorsed this approach.
15. Work is now in progress to advertise for an external consultant, ideally someone with a legal, rather than management consultancy, background.
16. The Council therefore makes this interim report to the Conference, detailing the work that has been done and the areas that still (or newly) need consideration and proposes to report finally, with draft Standing Orders, to the 2024 Conference.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 3/14. The Conference receives the Report.**