

34. Methodist Diaconal Order General Report

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Our life together as deacons and members of the Order

Membership:

The Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) has a complement of 255 members:

131 in the active work (including 9 diaconal probationers)
114 supernumerary deacons
10 diaconal students

In addition:

1 authorised deacon and 1 associate deacon in the active work

1 supernumerary associate deacon

A number of 'Associate members' and 'Friends' who commit to support the Order through prayer and advocacy.

- three full members and one MDO Associate member have died;
- four diaconal ordinands have been ordained into the diaconate within the universal Church and three diaconal probationers were received into Full Connexion with the Conference, full membership of the MDO and ordained to the diaconate within the universal Church;
- three diaconal probationers are to be recommended to the Conference 2022 for reception into Full Connexion with the Conference, full membership of the MDO and ordination to the diaconate within the universal Church;
- two people were accepted as candidates for training and three further candidates will be recommended to the Conference 2022;
- two members are seeking permission to 'sit down'.

Our life together as members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

We give thanks for the work that we been able to undertake on revising the MDO Rule of Life as directed by the Conference 2019. It will be with pleasure that we will present the revision to the Conference this year. As a consequence of COVID-19 this work has taken a little longer than originally planned and we have not been able to meet physically either in our Area Groups or at Convocation to do this work. However, as members our commitment remained high and this work was to able be fully engaged with, across the whole Order, using practices and methods which sought to maximise participation and give space for all voices; above all it has been seen as a prayerful endeavour to enable the MDO to serve God in the present age.

As this Report is being submitted for the Agenda, the Order is preparing for its first physical Convocation in three years, there will also be a small number of members who for pastoral reasons, will continue to participate via Zoom. This year the Convocation takes as its theme: **'All our hope on God is founded; still our trust God renews'** and will draw on Romans 8:18-27 as its guiding scripture. After three years 'apart' and in a new venue the timetable will provide 'extra space' this year simply to be together to enable us to take joy in being

together. We are delighted that 'Reflect' - the Methodist Retreat Association will be facilitating sessions which invite us to deepen our relationship with God. Alongside, we will also be doing the work of Convocation - picking up on other areas of work from the Conference 2019 report on the diaconate and MDO; exploring an MDO response to Action for Hope; engaging with Walking with Micah; and hearing from our President, Vice-President, Youth President and Secretary of the Conference as well as a number of guests from within our Connexion and from ecumenical diaconal orders and associations.

Our life and ministry within God's Church

In common with the disciples of Christ everywhere, members continued to seek to serve God and God's world during the pandemic and to do so as the world begins to live beyond restrictions yet still with COVID-19. Members continue to commit to the life of prayer, upholding before God the world, the Church, and each other, and through the MDO Examen to review their response to God's grace and mercy, and to a life of Witness and Service, characterised by the ministry of Jesus seen in a bowl and towel and lived out in the discipline of being willing to serve where the Conference directs and to engage with the Church as it seeks to follow the way of our Servant Christ.

Like many disciples of Christ the way of following may not always be straightforward and during these past two years we have found ourselves challenged and at times worn down, yet with God's grace and help we give thanks for new opportunities and renewed invitations to continue to offer a life of service to the Church as it joins in with God's work in the world. This year 24 deacons made themselves available to be directly stationed by the Conference; in September they and the Circuits they serve alongside will discover afresh what it means to be a deacon and serve the present age.

The Theology and Ecclesiology of the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order (Conference 2019 report)

The MDO continues to work with the others to embed the theology and ecclesiology of the diaconate and the MDO into the life of whole Church. During the next connexional year the MDO will review its Mission Statement and seek to address reflections around diaconal dress. At Convocation 2022 the Secretary of the Conference will assist us in exploring questions around deacons and the office of the Vice-President and we will appoint a small working group to help facilitate the work on the Mission Statement.

Our relationship with other diaconal orders and deacons

Sadly, again in this past year, due to COVID-19 we have not been able to share hospitality and fellowship in ways we have become accustomed to doing. However, we have participated via Zoom in conferences, conversations and Councils related to the diaconates of the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, and World Diakonia regions. We remain committed in our membership to the Diakonia Africa-Europe region of World Diakonia (DRAE) and in fellowship with the Diaconate of Southern Africa Methodist Connexion. We will gladly welcome physically and virtually a number of ecumenical guests to the Convocation 2022. We are delighted the Revd Deacon Ann Wren of the Scottish Episcopalian, former leader in DRAE, and long-standing friend of the Order, will be leading the Ordinands' retreat this year and in May the Warden and Deputy Warden were invited to be guest speakers (via Zoom) at the diaconate conference of Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

34/1. The Conference received the Report.

34/2. The Conference resolved that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire from Tuesday 2 May until Friday 5 May 2023.