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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report *Reaffirming Our Calling: Oversight and Trusteeship*, was received at the 2020 Conference, and comments invited on it from around the Connexion.
- 1.2 The report brought together responses to a series of concerns and ideas that had been explored over the previous three years by (*inter alia*) the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), and the Methodist Council. The questions that those bodies explored were essentially twofold:
 - 1.3 Firstly, in the context (starkly revealed by the 2017 triennial returns <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/statistics-for-mission/historic-data-archive/2017-statistics-reports/>) of a church in long-term numerical decline, do we have structures of oversight and governance that are both affordable and effective in enabling us to be a missional community?
 - 1.4 Secondly, when one of the most frequently expressed concerns of many in ministry is the demands that administration and compliance place on them, are the Methodist Church in Britain's (MCB) trusteeship arrangements suitable for a charity operating as it does within the current regulatory systems?
 - 1.5 The Conference received the report and passed a series of resolutions. Over the year, work on each resolution has progressed and the interrelationship of the different strands explored. The development of the work is best represented by this report having a different structure from the 2020 report so for each of reference the 2020 resolutions are listed here with a summary of developments and indications of where these connect into this year's report:

The 2020 Resolutions:

25/0. The Conference receives the Report and invites comments on it from around the Connexion.

Comments were invited in various ways, including a blog by the Secretary of the Conference, articles in the Methodist Recorder. The replies received have been taken account of in the ongoing thinking and the preparation of this report.

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- 25/1. The Conference welcomes and affirms the ethos and direction of the Report's section on local church trusteeship, and supports the suggestion that raising the minimum size for a Local Church will assist Circuits to coordinate their mission. The Conference, therefore, directs the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to ensure that a review of Standing Order 605 (1) and (2) takes place and that a proposal is brought to the 2021 Conference to raise the minimum size for a Local Church,**

The Council has considered this, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, and proposes that the minimum size for a Local Church is raised to twelve. See paragraphs 8.1 -8.5.

together with examples of creative ways in which one Church on multiple sites and/or federations of classes under a united Church Council can enable local missional communities to flourish.

Some creative examples are referred to at paragraphs 8.6-9, together with some facilitating Standing Order amendments.

In the light of this, and to maximise the potential fruitfulness of all Circuits' use of their resources, the Conference further directs all Circuit Meetings to review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and encourages Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling.

This has been encouraged across the Connexion, and the Coordination Group hopes that these conversations continue in Circuits.

- 25/1a. The Conference directs Circuit Meetings and Church Councils to undertake Unconscious Bias related training in order to ensure equality and diversity within the appointments process of the new trustee bodies.**

Provision has been made for this training to be made available across the Connexion.

- 25/2. The Conference refers to the Law and Polity Committee Section 4 of the report and directs the Committee to report to the 2021 Conference on the legal and constitutional issues that the proposal to create a smaller trustee body raises.**

The report of the Law and Polity Committee in this respect can be found at paragraphs 4.2-4.23 of this report.

- 25/3. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to convene a review of the size of the Conference as required under SO 100(2) and to report with recommendations for any changes to the 2021 Conference.**

The report of the review can be found at section 6 of this report.

- 25/4. The Conference directs the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to review the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.**

The interim report can be found at section 5 of this report.

- 25/5. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to bring proposals for a discernment process for senior posts, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.**

The proposals can be found at section 9 of this report.

- 25/6a. The Conference directs that within the process of reviewing mission plans, committee structures and ways of working at District Level, equality and diversity will be taken into consideration, and that any persons responsible for appointing new members to those committees will undertake Unconscious Bias related training.**

Districts have been taking this forward.

- 25/6. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that each District reviews its mission plan, committee structure and ways of working and considers its findings alongside other Districts in a regional grouping.**

- 25/7. The Conference directs the Council to appoint a task group to receive reports from regional groups and to report to the 2021 Conference with proposals for change from 2022 onwards.**

See section 7 of this report in relation to resolutions 25/6 and 25/7.

- 25/8. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to consider the report and to report to the 2021 Conference on the faith and order issues that the proposals raise.**

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Section 3 of this report, which considers the principles which underpin this work, includes some of the reflections of the Faith and Order Committee, but the Committee's response to the Resolution is in a separate report.

25/9. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to convene a small group to have oversight of the work on structures of oversight and trusteeship to ensure that there is collaborative working, further consultation as necessary and that concerns already identified and comments received after the Conference are addressed, and in order to ensure that the proposals brought to the 2021 Conference are cohesive and comprehensive.

This report is brought by the group convened under this resolution. The Conference is asked to appoint a steering group to take this work forward, and to bring firm recommendations to the 2022 Conference. See section 10 of this report.

- 1.6 The group is grateful to those who responded to the Conference's invitation to comment on the report and to all those who in different ways have contributed to the work this year.
- 1.7 In addition to reporting on the progress made in response to the resolutions, this report reminds the Conference of the broader context in which this work has been undertaken, not least through reaffirming *Our Calling* and indicating the principles behind the work (sections 2 and 3). Where appropriate, each section begins with the relevant resolution/s from the 2020 Conference, then indicates the work and the thinking that has been undertaken since then, and concludes with proposals and resolution/s as to how that area of the work will be taken forward during 2021/2022.
- 1.8 In exploring the two presenting issues (as set out in paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 above), it became clear that a number of other questions (some of them only partly resolved in earlier work) also needed to be brought into the frame:
- The efficacy of the Conference as trustee body was discussed, leading to conversations about its size which related to the regular review of the number of members of the Conference as required by SO 100(2).
 - The recognition that the size and number of governance bodies needed to be reviewed raised questions about how representation can be achieved which led to a consideration of the function and number of Districts. This picks up on the work of the 'Larger than Circuit' working party, which reported in 2016, and the requirement that Districts regularly review their life and mission.

- The reported struggles of Circuits and Local Churches to fill all the offices required to be filled and to be effective in their mission, and the difficulties that some circuits reported that these created as they sought to be the unit through which the interconnectedness of local churches in mission is expressed, prompted a review of the minimum size of a church and the possibilities of new ways of sharing resources and oversight within circuits (see in particular Notice of Motion 2018/201, Memorials M10 and M11 (2019), and Memorial M17 (2019), which are shown in Appendix 1 below).

- 1.9 The 2020 report was an attempt to bring together these many and complex questions. The Conference received the report and passed a number of resolutions that directed the work to continue with appropriate liaison with the Districts, the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee. The last of the resolutions (25/9) created a group to “have oversight of the work on structures of oversight and trusteeship to ensure that there is collaborative working, further consultation as necessary and that concerns already identified are addressed, and in order to ensure that the proposals brought to the 2021 Conference are cohesive and comprehensive.” This is the report of that group which summarises the work done under each of the resolutions adopted by the 2020 Conference (including incorporating as set out the report of the Law and Polity Committee in respect of Resolution 25/2).

***RESOLUTION

30/1. The Conference receives the Report.

2. Reaffirming Our Calling

- 2.1 This report summarises the work undertaken since the Conference of 2020 and also seeks to remind the Conference of the broader context in which this work has been undertaken. The title of the 2020 report was drawn from a general supposition that the impetus and inspiration of the work is to be found in *Our Calling*, the statement which the Conference endorsed in 2000.
- 2.2 That general supposition is widely shared but rarely explicitly articulated as *Our Calling* continues to shape the work of the Church in often implicit ways. The development of *A Methodist Way of Life* is one of the clearer signals of the resonance that *Our Calling* finds in the hearts of many Methodists. The authors of the 2000 report did not pretend that it was perfect as a statement of the Church’s mission, simply that it would enable work to develop. After 21 years, there can be celebration that it has focused thinking around the Connexion and

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provided common themes. The Church identifies key strategies as being right for our mission if they clearly reflect *Our Calling*.

- 2.3 The *Our Calling* vision statement, therefore, has been with us for 21 years and during that period has been a central part of the Church's life. How central is clear from the number of local churches that display the statement, adorn their worship area with banners representing Worship, Learning and Caring, Service, and Evangelism, and organise their administrative life according to those four themes. In recent years, the Conference and the Council have repeatedly returned to *Our Calling* as the strategic driver for the work of the Church.

Our Calling does not pretend to be a statement of ecclesiology. The Conference in 1999 had adopted the report *Called to Love and Praise* as its statement of the 'nature of the Christian Church in Methodist experience and practice'. The report stressed that the Church must continue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be flexible in adapting its structures as it sought more effectively to fulfil its vocation facing new challenges and situations. The report¹ summarised the vocation of the Church as 'to celebrate the love of God in its worship, to share [God's] life in its fellowship, and to be the agent of [God's] generosity and compassion to a needy world.'

Called to Love and Praise reaffirmed the value of connexionalism as expressing the interdependence of all churches through 'the structures of fellowship, consultation, government and oversight' and as helping to point up to 'necessary priorities in mission and service.'² The 2017 Conference adopted the report, *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, affirming that 'For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian'³. The work authorised by the Conference in 1999 in response to the Council report in appointing the Strategic Goals Planning Group can be understood as being to identify those necessary priorities. In doing so, the *Our Calling* report argued that the whole Church needed to rediscover its shared vision of what the Church is for, so that the Church's priorities could be refocused, with imagination and energy released to achieve identified plans and targets, alongside changes to the culture of the Church's work in a contemporary society.

The weight put behind this process was to encourage every part of the Church from the Conference to Local Churches to take ownership of the work and its outcomes.

1 The Methodist Church, 1999, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.7.10

2 The Methodist Church, 1999, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.6.2.

3 The Methodist Church, 2017, *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, 4

The Conference in 2000 endorsed the vision of what the Church is for, and called for churches, Circuits, Districts and connexional bodies to develop the process entitled “Our Calling to fulfil” over the following years. “We want to make second nature among Methodists (and partners from other denominations who share our life at local level) the words which crystallise our vision of what the church is for. The Church exists to

- Increase awareness of God’s presence and to celebrate God’s love
- Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care
- Be a good neighbour to people in need and to question injustice
- Make more followers of Jesus Christ

The Church is for: WORSHIP, LEARNING & CARING, SERVICE, EVANGELISM”⁴

- 2.4 In 2004 the Conference received the report, *Priorities for the Methodist Church*, which was part of the “Where are we heading?” consultation process. This report builds on the work of *Our Calling*, whilst creating alongside it, priorities for the Methodist Church.

The 2004 report concluded by acknowledging that the Methodist Church in Britain was ready for a change. It aimed to re-group the Church’s resources to make a difference, especially in partnership with others. It recognised that each Local Church must “sharpen its missionary vocation, appropriate to its context, inspired by the *Our Calling* process”. It encouraged Circuits and Districts, along with connexional bodies, to refocus their mission, identifying structures and systems that needed to be reviewed. The report acknowledged that if the church continued as it was, the systems and structures would come under “ever-greater pressure and the sense of being a stretched, exhausted and marginal institution will increase.” The Conference adopted the *Priorities for the Methodist Church* in this report and directed the Methodist Council, with the Connexional Team, to continue the work on a strategic plan.

- 2.5 Over the following years, a task group (the Team Focus Group) was formed with an aim for a “reconfigured Team to be ready to serve the Church in September 2008”. The Conference endorsed the aims and emphases proposed for the reconfigured Connexional Team and directed the Methodist Council to continue the work, so that the reconfigured Team could become operative on 1 September 2008. The Team that was being aimed for was one of flexibility and

4 The Methodist Church, 2000, *Our Calling*

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responsiveness that develops its mission in a rapidly changing context. Further work, including an examination of the nature and nomenclature of committees and working groups (in a report to the 2010 Conference) was based on the structures of Team Focus.

- 2.6 The 21 years of *Our Calling* being second nature have also, however, been a period marked by continuing numerical decline. In 2017, the Conference received the triennial *Statistics for Mission* report, detailing the number of Methodist churches and members as at 31 October 2016. The report included the sobering statistic that membership stood at 188,398 a decline of more than 80,000 in a decade⁵. If minds were not already sharpened on the urgency of the task before the Church, that statistic alone served to hone the discussions over the next six months.
- 2.7 In January 2018, the Methodist Council received the paper MC/18/1 in response to conversations at the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) and the Council, which followed the presentation of the Statistics for Mission to the 2017 Conference. The paper outlined the challenges faced by the Church and offered thoughts as to a way forward. The culmination of the reflections at CLF and the Council was to reaffirm *Our Calling* as the primary strategic driver for the whole Church.

Reaffirming Our Calling: the future call of the Methodist Church was then presented to the 2018 Conference. This looked in more detail at how the Church can serve the present age and how connexional life can be resourced. The CLF, Council and the SRC instigated work in a number of areas as well as continuing to monitor ongoing work which will be impacted by this focus. Such areas include:

- Evangelism and growth
- Development of District and Circuit Mission plans
- Connexional Vocations and Ministry Strategy
- Review of the decision-making and oversight processes and ways of working to provide simple and cost-effective mechanisms for the oversight of the Methodist Church.
- Connexional Finance Strategy
- Connexional Property Strategy
- Enabling the evolution of the Connexional Team best to support the Church in engaging and responding to *Our Calling*.

5 The Methodist Church, 2017, *Statistics for Mission*

- 2.8 By 2020 key objectives were agreed for the Methodist Council to follow up. These objectives were:
- Proclaiming the gospel through worship and promoting the ministry of the whole people of God.
 - Building a church for all people; an inclusive church, diverse, welcoming, and reaching out to the marginalised in society.
 - Being God's church in God's world; striving for justice and peace and resourcing work and programmes which transform individuals and communities; changes to embody the Kingdom of God.
 - Having an Evangelism and Growth strategy (God for All), equipping Methodists to be people confident in evangelism and church planting.
 - Resourcing the Church; the use of God's gifts (people, money, and property) effectively; and to develop oversight and leadership functions appropriate to the Methodist Church for stewardship of resources for the mission of the church at all levels.
 - Responding to the gospel in partnership in Britain and overseas and playing a part in the transformation of the world.
- 2.9 The time therefore has come to be more explicit in the affirmation of *Our Calling* and formally to assert what has been only implicitly stated up until now that the strategic driver for the work of the MCB is to be found in *Our Calling*. The way in which the Church structures its life will be guided by principles that are drawn from the Conference's understanding that the vocation of the Connexion is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

***RESOLUTIONS

30/2. The Conference adopts *Our Calling* as the primary strategic driver for the Church's work.

30/3. The Conference affirms the Methodist Council objectives as set out in paragraph 2.8.

3. The principles behind our work

- 3.1 The report received by the 2020 Conference responded to the concerns of the SRC, CLF and the Council regarding the current methods of oversight, whilst looking at where trusteeship sits within the structure of the Church. The discussions clarified the two main aims of this work: "to ensure we can comply

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and better demonstrate compliance with our obligations as a charity, and, secondly, to ensure appropriate representation and a better model of conferring that enables the Church to fulfil its calling.”

- 3.2 One of the complicating factors in the discussion over the past year has been the different ways in which, necessarily, the word “trusteeship’ is used. Trusteeship has been part of the vocabulary of the Church throughout its existence. The Deed of Declaration (1784) was written by John Wesley for rendering effectual the trusts that had been created and the avoidance of doubt and litigation in respect of those trusts. Our chapels, therefore, have always had Trustees and the Connexion has had Trustees. As the Faith and Order Committee has noted, the concept of ‘trusteeship’ is closely related to the idea of stewardship.

Confusion can arise when the term trustee is used of members of Church Councils or Circuit Meetings who, as well as being Managing Trustees for the property and many of the funds of the church or Circuit, are also charity trustees. The Charity Commission speaks of trustees as “the people who share ultimate responsibility for governing a charity and directing how it is managed and run.” Those charities which are registered with the Charity Commission are required to report annually to the Commission and to keep the information that the Commission holds up to date. One of the key questions behind this report (and the core of much of its complexity) is how Trustees in the Methodist Church hold together the stewardship that has been entrusted to them by the Church with the expectation of UK charity statutes and regulatory authorities that they ‘share ultimate responsibility’ and ‘direct how [the Church] is managed and run.’ The Faith and Order Committee has drawn attention to the rich area for theological reflection that there is in these concepts and will report further to a future Conference.

- 3.3 The exploration of the nature of trusteeship is one of five ‘in principle’ issues which were identified in the 2020 report:
1. The nature of the oversight in the life of the Church
 2. The authority of the Conference and what is delegated
 3. The nature of trusteeship and whether different forms of trusteeship can or should be held in different places
 4. The nature of representation
 5. The nature of the committee structure that enables the Council and the Conference to do their work.

The 2020 report seeks to set out a way in which the structures of the Church can be adapted to meet the twin aims identified above (paragraph 3.1) whilst

holding onto and seeking to address those five ‘in principle’ issues. The Faith and Order Committee’s response includes some initial reflection on some of these principles, but they will be explored further and developed through the work which will be undertaken during the next connexional year.

- 3.4 The first in principle issue overarches the others. Fundamentally, oversight is ‘the function of ensuring that the Church remains true to its calling’ and involves ‘the process of reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world’⁶. A key feature of oversight is ensuring the continuity of the Church in apostolic faith and mission.
- 3.5 The report of the Faith and Order Committee received by the 2005 Conference, *The Nature of Oversight*, set out ways of understanding this crucial concept in the life of the Church. Beginning from the assumption that in Methodism oversight is shared between bodies from across the Connexion and that there are two main strands of that oversight (that held by formal bodies and that held by ministers appointed by the Conference), the report defined three main headings under which the tasks of oversight can be understood – Governance, Leadership and Management. Although as later reports have argued (and as the authors of the 2005 report acknowledged), Governance, Leadership and Management do not exhaust the understanding of oversight (and might be argued to relate more closely to the first ‘strand’, which is the subject of this report, than to the second)⁷, the reforms proposed in the current work will have failed if they do not lead to better and theologically informed governance, leadership and management.
- 3.6 This year’s report on supervision offers an helpful way in which to define oversight which captures the essence of the approach taken here: ‘Oversight is here understood to refer to the processes by which the Church is held together and to Christ through the Conference, through the personal ministry of those appointed to oversight roles on behalf of the Conference, and through the collegial and representative bodies that oversee aspects of the Church’s work on behalf of the Conference..... The various committees and councils of the Church, led by those appointed to oversight roles, exercise discernment in order to set direction for the Church and for particular churches and projects.’⁸
- 3.7 Governance, Leadership and Management are always exercised, of course, in the

6 The Methodist Church, 2005, *The Nature of Oversight*, second paragraph and 1.10

7 The Methodist Church and the Church of England, 2017, *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, 39(f), quoted in *Ministry in the Methodist Church* found elsewhere in this Agenda at paragraph 6.2.

8 Report found elsewhere in this Agenda, Reflective Supervision, paragraph 3.3

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context of Methodism's understanding of what it means to be the Church in the 'present age' and to be the Church means to share in God's mission. Our self-understanding is that the Methodist Church in Britain was 'raised up to spread Scriptural Holiness...'⁹ As J H Rigg (the great student of Church organisation) put it as long ago as 1897, 'Methodism can never be understood unless it is borne in mind that it is essentially a missionary organisation.... A missionary inspiration should govern the whole working of our Church.'¹⁰ The implicit pragmatism of this approach continues to be reflected in Conference statements; as *Ministry in the Methodist Church* notes, 'The Methodist Church has, at different times, adapted its structures to respond to new situations and opportunities, and regards this flexibility in itself as an important principle alongside underlying principles of interdependence and relatedness and small-group fellowship and discipline.'¹¹ Our structures, therefore, not only facilitate engagement in mission but also to express the nature of the church as a people called to be agents of God's Mission in God's world. Our response to the gospel of God's love in Christ is not only to proclaim the good news but to be the good news that we proclaim.

- 3.8 This is reflected in models of conferring, participation, representation (and inclusion), and mutual accountability. The structures that we create or amend must be those that enable Methodists to attend to the voice of the Spirit in their discernment and decision-making. The Faith and Order Committee has contributed to the thinking around this by suggesting that three emphases be considered as this work progresses.
- 3.9 The first is an emphasis on '**relatedness**' as essential to the concept of 'church', finding expression in the 'connexional principle'.¹² Alongside reflection on how different parts of the church interconnect, this might also mean looking at how connexional structures and ways of working could model something to districts, circuits and local churches, and thus be a gift to the whole church. For example, the Committee notes that the current Methodist Council (like many bodies in the Church) meets a few times a year and has a large agenda before it, whilst it heard an example of a trustee body for another organisation which met frequently and had more ongoing involvement in scrutiny, support and matters of governance. Reflection on how a trustee body might best function seems timely, and there are various alternative ways of working which might be explored. Questions of how such a body (and its committees) relate to and with the Connexional Team are also important; as is some consideration of the power dynamics within and

9 CPD Volume 2, The Deed of Union, Clause 4

10 Rigg, *Church Organization*. Appendix C, p25.

11 *Ministry in the Methodist Church*, 5.4.3

12 The Methodist Church, 1999, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.7.1

between different bodies and the effects this has on conferring. Attention to ways of working enables openness, conversation, trust and confidence to develop. Questions about how a body is enabled to be productive, effective, and robustly held to account are particularly relevant.

- 3.10 The second is an emphasis on **participation**. This also flows from the centrality of ‘relatedness’ and is an aspect of the Methodist understanding of oversight as something that is shared. The Faith and Order Committee notes that this has often found expression in language about representation, but this is too frequently interpreted in a particular and narrow way which relies on a small number of individuals representing diverse bodies or (sometimes) large constituencies within the life of the Church. It is the summative skill and experience of a body which is important, rather than solely a consideration of individual attributes. A focus on participation might be more helpful as it provokes bodies to think about how well they are listening to all parts of the church, to ask who might feel marginalised and why, to pay attention to questions of power, to strive to be transparent, to think about effective communication, to look at what the body needs at a particular time, and to be willing to be changed by engaging with different communities within the Methodist Church.
- 3.11 The third, is the Methodist Church’s emphasis on **conferring**. The process of Christian conferring has been described as “the bedrock of the Methodist movement”.¹³ Christian conferring is a gift of God through which people take spiritual and theological counsel together. It is “a process of intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue to which there are two important, complementary strands. As they confer, people intentionally, prayerfully and thoughtfully seek to describe and analyse their experience and to listen to others doing the same, and they give and receive guidance, advice, challenge and support. In this they are exercising both mutual accountability and supervision. These complementary strands are two sides of the one coin.”¹⁴ Conferring is a vital aspect of discernment and it is timely to give further attention to the question of how we confer well together. What structures and ways of working help us to better confer in all parts of the Church? How might the Conference, Executive Council, and any connexional committees model different ways of conferring well, which includes paying attention to how they consult, oversee pieces of work, debate, and make decisions?
- 3.12 As the proposal for a change for the charity trustee arrangements is developed,

13 The Methodist Church, 2005, *The Nature of Oversight*, 2.13

14 The Methodist Church, 2005, *The Nature of Oversight*, 2.15

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it will seek to embody that approach. It seeks to preserve the conferring in the Conference and other bodies, to ensure that the Church has effective leadership. This is to focus not only on the most efficient ways of working, but on the calling of the Church to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and which seeks to embody the Good News in the way that it orders its life.

- 3.13 In the sections that follow, this report will chart the progress that has been made in thinking through how a more effective structure for the Church might be created. The Conference is asked to approve the proposals recommended, or where requested to affirm the direction of travel and to direct that more work be done.

4. The Connexional Council

Resolution 25/2: The Conference referred to the Law and Polity Committee Section 4 of the report and directed the Committee to report to the 2021 Conference on the legal and constitutional issues that the proposal to create a smaller trustee body raises.

- 4.1 This section is in two parts: Part A is the report of the Law and Polity Committee in response to resolution 25/2 of the 2020 Conference (it is a report of that Committee without amendment, included here for convenience); Part B represents the continuation of the report of the Coordinating Group concerning the proposed Connexional Council (named the Executive Council in the 2020 report). The proposed change in nomenclature reflects conversations in the Methodist Council, the Law and Polity Committee, and the Coordinating Group which, negatively, highlighted some of the difficulties around the language of 'executive' whilst the Conference remains 'the governing body' and, positively, saw the change as emphasising the role of the Council as a body which acts on behalf of the whole Connexion, listens to the whole Connexion, and represents the whole Connexion (both in the sense of comprising representatives of different parts of the Connexion and in the sense of acting on behalf of the Conference). In this report, therefore, the term 'Connexional Council' is used.

Part A: The Report of the Law and Polity Committee

Principles

- 4.2 Conference resolution 25/2 reads as follows:

25/2. The Conference referred to the Law and Polity Committee Section 4 of the report and directed the Committee to report to the 2021 Conference on the legal

and constitutional issues that the proposal to create a smaller trustee body raises.

- 4.3 Section 4 of the 2020 Conference report contains a proposal that a small body (12 to 25 in number) replace the Conference as the charity trustees of the Methodist Church, although in the first paragraph of section 5 the report states that “The Conference will continue to be the governing body of the Church and the trustee body would work within that framework”.
- 4.4 The Law and Polity Committee shared this draft report with the Methodist Council and others to enable comments to be made on its observations and recommendations.
- 4.5 The first important point to note is that the Methodist Church did not ‘choose’ to make the Conference our charity trustees; indeed the concept of choice, while relevant when setting up a new charity, does not arise when identifying the trustees of an existing charity, because section 177 of the Charities Act 2011 defines the charity trustees as being “the persons having the general control and management of the administration of a charity”. Under our present constitution those persons are the members of the Conference. Clause 18 of the Deed of Union vests in the Conference the “government...of the Methodist Church and the management and administration of its affairs”. The second part of that quotation so closely resembles the exact terms of section 177 as to put the matter, in our judgment, beyond doubt.
- 4.6 However, clause 18 is amendable and the Conference has, in effect, by resolution 25/2 referred to Law and Polity the question of whether there is any legal and constitutional way of giving effect to the recommendations in Part 4 of the 2020 Conference report, so in what follows we attempt to address that question.
- 4.7 We need to start, as always, with the Methodist Church Act, 1976, because the terms of that can be amended only by Parliament. Section 2 defines ‘the Conference’ as meaning “the Conference of the Methodist Church constituted under ... the Act of 1929 and the Deed of Union and includes the governing body from time to time of the Methodist Church”. The important words, in particular, are “governing body”. Section 3(a) makes the Conference the final authority within the Church on the interpretation of doctrine, section 5 gives it power to amend the Deed of Union and section 6 power to enter into schemes of union with other churches. There are other sections which assume, rather than enact, that it will be a body of the same character as the existing Conference, with a President, Vice-President and Secretary.
- 4.8 Clause 11 of the Deed provides that “The governing body of the Methodist

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Church shall be the Conference constituted and meeting annually as provided in this Deed”. Like clause 18, that is in principle amendable, but in the light of the provisions in the Act it is difficult to see how there could legitimately be any amendment removing the status of the Conference as governing body or radically altering its nature.

- 4.9 Finally, as noted above, the 2020 Conference report states that under its recommendations the Conference “will continue to be the governing body of the Church”.
- 4.10 For all these reasons it is clear that the continuance of the Conference as the governing body is for us one ‘given’. The other is section 177 of the Charities Act, quoted in paragraph 4.5 above, and the issue therefore boils down to the question whether some body of the kind recommended in the 2020 Conference report can have the characteristics required to fall within section 177 without derogating from the powers and responsibilities of the Conference as the governing body.
- 4.11 In seeking to answer that question we have found it helpful to pay particular attention to the phrase “of the administration” in section 177, because that can, we think, be properly understood as permitting the existence of a body of charity trustees who manage ‘the administration’ of the charity but are not the ‘governing body’. To achieve that result for Methodism would require the amendment of the provision in clause 18 of the Deed of Union that “the management and administration of [the Church’s] affairs shall be vested in the Conference”, but to make such an amendment is within the power of the Conference.
- 4.12 We have therefore checked with the Coordinating Group carrying forward the whole topic of the Conference report and resolutions under resolution 25/9 and with the Strategy and Resources Committee whether they consider that the proposals for the constitution and functions of the proposed new connexional trustee body would fit within the framework suggested in the preceding paragraph, or can be accommodated to do so. We understand that in general they do but, as is so often the case, ‘the devil is in the detail’, so it will be important to keep the considerations rehearsed above in mind as proposals are fleshed out and then implemented by legislation. In that regard it is important to stress that the test is whether any new body can operate within the words quoted from section 177, not whether it accords with any ‘standard’ model of governance/management, or with that of other organisations.
- 4.13 What the statute requires is that the trustees manage ‘the administration’, but not that they have no other functions. Any extension beyond that, however, will

be limited by the need to avoid impinging on the position of the Conference as governing body, and, within those limits, will be guided by policy and polity considerations.

- 4.14 If this suggestion were carried forward, CPD would require significant (but still possible) amendment. We envisage that in broadest outline the fundamental changes would be along the lines set out in the Appendix to this Law and Polity Committee report.

Outworking

- 4.15 The working through of the amendments to Standing Orders will, as indicated in paragraphs 4.13 and 4.14 above, require decisions on a number of mixed policy/polity issues. In that regard we think it important to clear away some misconceptions in the 2020 report to the Conference. In the first place it fails altogether to have regard to the crucial fact that the Conference is, among other things, a legislature. That is linked with a tendency at times to approach structural issues in the light of commercial analogies. To the limited extent to which any analogy is helpful, that of other membership organisations, and (because of the legislative function) also that of Parliament's relationship with the executive, need at least equal attention. Moreover, the report refers in places to the relationship between the Conference and any new charity trustee body in terms of 'delegation', whereas it is clear from section 177 that the latter must have independent 'control and management' of the administration, so that in effect some responsibilities and powers will be transferred (rather than delegated) to the new trustee body (albeit it will be appointed by and accountable to the Conference).
- 4.16 As to specifics, it seems clear from the 1976 Act that doctrine must be reserved to the Conference, and we believe that both in order to remain the governing body, and also because it is the more appropriate body for the purpose, the Conference should still be the legislature and policy-maker, and remain in control of at least the formation and discipline of ministers and other officers and members, polity, stationing, the overall size of the budget and the allocation of district contributions. Stationing will include the appointment of ministers to connexional office, but responsibility for other connexional appointments will be a matter for policy decisions, although the charity trustees should manage the administration of employment contracts. On matters coming to the Conference for decision it will be vital that it has ample opportunity and material for informed debate, including reports setting out clearly any considerations militating against, as well as those supporting, the recommendations made.
- 4.17 The appointment and oversight of connexional committees should in principle

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rest with the body with whose responsibilities the committee is concerned, and on that basis Faith and Order, Stationing and Law and Polity would be Conference committees. There are others, however, in particular the three for Ministries, Mission, and Finance and Resources, which by that criterion need direct relationships with both the Conference and the charity trustees, and thought is needed on how that can be achieved most simply and effectively.

- 4.18 These matters will in turn inform further consideration as to the size, nature and form of the new charity trustee body itself. That might include the possibility of incorporation, to which we return below, but meanwhile any references to number or composition should be understood as being to the individual trustees if unincorporated or to the directors if the trustee body is corporate.
- 4.19 As we understand the Conference report, the new charity trustees would replace the Strategy and Resources Committee, to which we see no objection, but also the Methodist Council. As to the Council, however, it seems unlikely to us that the number, composition and workload of the new trustee body will fit them to take over all the present functions of the Methodist Council, as set out in Standing Orders 211 and 212 (211(1) being a particularly significant example). It should therefore be considered carefully, item by item, which of them are appropriate for the trustee body, and where responsibility for the others should rest.

[The SRC have kindly shared with our Oversight and Trusteeship sub-committee successive stages of their thinking on these points, including the specific functions which they envisage the trustee body as having, and members of our sub-committee have commented on them and are happy to continue to do so.]

External guidance and advice

- 4.20 At an appropriate stage the views of the Charity Commission as to the acceptability of the central thrust of the proposed amendments should be sought (they seem generally to be encouraging moves toward smaller bodies of charity trustees). It may very well also be desirable to obtain professional legal advice. However, we are clear that it would be premature to take either of those steps before receiving any response which the Conference may make to this paper and undertaking further reflection and work.

Incorporation and timescale

- 4.21 We return to the topic of incorporation, and the possible forms it might take. Incorporation is not necessary and might result in a further degree of administration and reporting, but it might also provide comfort in terms of

limiting trustee liability, and greater administrative convenience by providing an independent legal entity for easier engagement in employment and other contracts, or as a party to litigation, which considerations also need to be weighed. However, once the subject of incorporation at the connexional level is raised that invites difficult questions as to the appropriate scope of the membership and directorate of any corporate body. Should the membership be the whole Methodist Church, as is the usual pattern in Civil Law jurisdictions, or the members of the Conference (and where would the charity trusteeship lie, in either of those events, given the principles set out above), or just those of the proposed new charity trustee body?

- 4.22 (The impact of such incorporation would of course only be at a connexional level, and would not affect the same issues at the other levels of trusteeship in the Church, albeit at a future point the possibilities of incorporation at other levels may also in time become considered to be of merit and feasible. The counter argument may be that existing models of trusteeship should continue to prevail out of choice or pragmatism, recognising that trustees can insure against liabilities and also take comfort from acting within the terms of their trust, and that even incorporation may not in practice provide much extra protection.)
- 4.23 Whether to take the possibility of incorporation on board, however, puts into sharp relief an issue not hitherto adequately addressed, namely the relative weights to be given to urgency and thoroughness. We advised the Methodist Council meeting in January 2021, that even if the questions about incorporation are deferred, and our other suggestions are approved without delay, it would in our view be very difficult, if not impossible, to bring a final report to the Conference of 2021. With a year for drafting and another for confirmation of amendments to the Deed of Union, and possibly of the Model Trusts, that would take us to 2023 at best, and more probably 2024, for implementation. Taking the possibility of incorporation, with all its possible variations, into account might well put the timetable even further back. On the other hand, it may be thought that if we are to embark upon such radical, once-in-a-generation, changes at all, the most important thing is to get it right first time, rather than take the risk that we would, within a few years, find ourselves having to choose between living with regrets and having to go through the whole process again.

Appendix to the Law and Polity Committee's response to the 2020 Conference Resolution 25/2

Outline of fundamental constitutional amendments

[We have used 'Connexional Council' as the title of the new trustee body, as the one

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currently recommended by the Coordinating Group, but it is merely illustrative.]

Clause 11 of the Deed of Union would stand.

Clause 18 in its present form would go, and in its place there would be provision for the basic framework of the functions of the Conference, sufficiently specific to make clear the demarcation from those of the [Connexional Council], but to be fleshed out in detail in Standing Orders.

Clause 21 would go, but clauses 19 and 20 would stand, with any necessary amendment of detail to reconcile with the major changes elsewhere.

There would be a new clause X, possibly as 21, but perhaps better in a new Section 9A, along the following lines:

X (1) There shall be a [Connexional Council] which shall, without derogation from the position, authority and powers of the Conference as governing body, have the general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church.

(2) [Provision for membership of the [Connexional Council], either in full or in the form of a basic framework and range of numbers, to be fleshed out in Standing Orders.]

(3) [Provision for the basic framework of its functions, sufficiently specific to make the demarcation from those of the Conference clear, but to be fleshed out in detail in Standing Orders.]

There would be an editorial footnote to X(1), explaining that one effect would be that the [Connexional Council] would constitute the trustees of the Methodist Church in Great Britain in charity law.

There might be other changes of detail in the Deed and Model Trusts, but those would be the crucial ones.

***RESOLUTIONS

30/4. The Conference receives the Report of the Law and Polity Committee in response to Resolution 25/2 of the Conference 2020.

30/5. The Conference directs that the Report of the Law and Polity Committee be taken into account in any work undertaken to carry forward the recommendations in Part 4 of the 2020 Conference report.

Part B: The Connexional Council

- 4.24 The Strategy and Resources Committee and the Methodist Council have continued to reflect on and develop thinking about the possible role and composition of the proposed Connexional Council. This section seeks to remind of some of the considerations and indicate some of the thinking, together with the Coordinating Group's proposals for the next steps.
- 4.25 The Methodist Church in Great Britain is a registered charity whose trustees are the members of the Conference. The 2020 report noted that whilst it was clear at the time of the Church's registration as a charity that the Conference would have to be the trustee body of the registered charity, this way of working is now felt to be less suitable for a number of reasons, many of which were detailed in a report commissioned by the SRC and discussed by the Council. Whilst, under the terms of the Methodist Church Act 1976 and the application of Section 177 of the Charities Act 2011, it has been legal and appropriate for the Conference to be the trustee body, as understanding and practice has developed, the Conference has increasingly been perceived as being too large a body to exercise effective trusteeship in the way in which charity trusteeship is now understood. A trustee body would normally be expected to meet more than once each year and to have a close engagement with the work of those who are employed by and exercise operational management of the charity. Additionally, much of the detailed work that trustees in another charity would undertake (eg, the scrutiny of accounts) is, within our current ways of working, undertaken by the Methodist Council and/or the Strategy and Resources Committee, sometimes leaving a lack of clarity about where responsibility really lies. There is also an expectation that the trustee body will comprise those with relevant skills and experience to oversee the work of the charity.
- 4.26 This section of the 2020 report raised a number of questions which the Conference referred to the Law and Polity Committee under resolution 25/2. The Law and Polity Committee's report to the Conference, as set out above, was shared in draft form with the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Methodist Council, the District Chairs, and the 25/9 Coordinating Group. These bodies have noted that, subject to further work and the seeking of external advice, in principle the Law and Polity Committee considers it possible for a separate body (such as the proposed Connexional Council) to be given functions to enable that body, rather than the Conference, to become the charity trustees under section 177 of the Charities Act 2011, but on the basis and subject to the provisos set out in their report. This enables the 'in principle' decisions of the 2020 Conference to be taken forward. The Conference is therefore asked to direct the Law and Polity and Strategy and Resources Committees to prepare the necessary Special

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Resolutions and draft amendments to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders for presentation to the Conference of 2022, in order to establish a Connexional Council as a trustee body, and, to the extent possible and appropriate, for it to replace both the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee.

- 4.27 Central to the provisos referred to in the Law and Polity Committee's report is the question, in general terms, of how to ensure an appropriate balance between the Conference remaining as the governing body, and the giving of appropriate powers and responsibilities to the Connexional Council to allow it properly to function as a trustee body, and, to the extent possible and appropriate, as successor to the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Methodist Council (the former being more straightforward, the latter being potentially more complex). The Conference is therefore asked to direct the Law and Polity Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee to work together to consider and resolve these issues, in order that an appropriate balance of powers and responsibilities may be included and reflected in the wording of the proposed Special Resolution and draft amendments, for consideration by the Conference of 2022. In undertaking this task, the two committees shall consult with others as appropriate, including the Faith and Order Committee, and obtain external professional advice at an appropriate stage.
- 4.28 As part of the wider process of restructuring, including in the work (detailed below) that the SRC has done on the committee structure of the Church (in response to resolution 25/4), consideration has been given to the broader questions of leadership that the Church needs alongside a more effective trustee body. One of the bodies which provides this is the Connexional Leaders' Forum. Looking at the future leadership of the church, there is a recommendation that the CLF encourages participation from the wider leadership of the Connexion as a place for conferring. Therefore, there is the opportunity to include the chairs of key connexional committees such as the Connexional Council, the three Committees that primarily report to the Connexional Council (Mission, Ministries, Finance and Property Committee), the Stationing Committee, the Law and Polity Committee, the Faith and Order Committee, and the EDI Committee/Inclusive Church Group, as well as including other persons appointed by the Conference to fulfil connexional duties to form part of the Forum on occasions as appropriate.
- 4.29 In terms of leadership and more generally, the role of the Presidency remains central. As such, it is proposed that the current President and Vice-President, the immediate ex-President and Vice-President, and the President and Vice-President Designate be regular invitees to meetings of the proposed Connexional Council, with power to attend and speak and contribute to the discussions. This will involve the Presidency in the deliberations of the Trustee body and further enable

voices from around the Connexion to be represented.

- 4.30 The Secretary of the Conference will occasionally convene a meeting of past Presidents and Vice-Presidents for an informal consultation to use their experience and wisdom to advise and support the leadership. This would not form part of the governance of the church.

***RESOLUTION

30/6. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee and as appropriate with others:

- a) to consider the functions, powers and responsibilities that should be given to the Connexional Council to enable it to become the connexional trustee body whilst ensuring that the Conference remains as the governing body of the Methodist Church in Great Britain;**
- b) to consider which functions, powers and responsibilities should be given to the Connexional Council in order to replace and abolish the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee, yet also to consider whether any of the present functions, powers and responsibilities of those bodies should be given instead, as may be necessary or appropriate, to the Conference or other Connexional Committee or body; and**

to prepare and bring to the Conference of 2022 the special and other resolutions to give effect to a) and b) above, together with the necessary amendments including to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.

5. The Committee Structure

Resolution 25/4: The Conference directed the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to review the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.

Resolution 25/6a: The Conference directs that within the process of reviewing mission plans, committee structures and ways of working at District Level, equality and diversity will be taken into consideration, and that any persons responsible for appointing new members to those committees will undertake Unconscious Bias related training.

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- 5.1 The 2020 Conference asked the SRC in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to 'review the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees' and bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference. One important area of concern, which had been previously discussed at the 2019 Conference, was considering the structures with the aim of providing more effective support, whilst enabling mission, ministry and better coordination. Another concern articulated in the 2020 Conference was to ensure the consideration of equality and diversity in all aspects of the work.
- 5.2 The Methodist Council has taken forward these objectives and this approach could lead to a more radical restructuring of the Methodist Church.
- 5.3 The recognition throughout this process that the current structures were designed for a larger Church means that part of the consideration has to be to seek to reduce and streamline where possible. Changes of connexional committees and organisational structures alone will not result in greater efficiencies, accountability, and the smoother working of the governance of the Connexion. There are other factors that need to be addressed such as the cultural change in the practice of governance, oversight, and trusteeship within the church.
- 5.4 A sub-group appointed by the SRC has done some further thinking in respect of possible new structures. A diagram of the new structure is included in this report, but it must be noted that this remains work in progress. Further work needs to be done to review which of the current committees needs to exist in its current form. The ways in which committees work, how they relate to each other, how roles and responsibilities of members are defined, and ensuring appropriate selection and discernment processes for members will also be important.
- 5.5 The structure that the SRC proposes is based on the assumption that the Connexional Council will act as the trustee body for the Methodist Church in Great Britain on behalf of the Conference, while the Conference will continue to be the governing body of the Church. The Connexional Council will be appointed by and accountable to the Conference. It will have the control and management of the connexional administration of the Church (ie, for the Connexion, as opposed to replacing in any way the responsibilities falling to District, Circuit and Local Church bodies), providing some focus and coherence to its activities and ensuring proper use of the resources and assets of the Church to fulfil its calling and for evangelism, worship, learning and caring and service. The Connexional Council will have the responsibility of ensuring that it functions in ways that are rooted in the principles of connexionalism, participation and conferring.
- 5.6 The essence of the current SO 211(2) will be taken into the role of the new

Connexional Council. However, it is proposed that the content of that Standing Order is reviewed as part of the process of establishing the Connexional Council.

- 5.7 The Connexional Council will report annually to the Conference, bringing to the notice of the Conference matters that it believes the Conference ought to give attention.
- 5.8 In addition to the reports from the Connexional Council, the Conference will also need to receive reports from three groups of committees:
- Those that relate to the life of the Conference, which would include the Conference's Business Committees;
 - Those committees with the oversight role to "preserve the integrity of the community in succession", principal amongst which are the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee;
 - Those relating to the oversight of individuals in ministry, eg, the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee.

There is also a group of bodies that exercise management and leadership, often through the development of policy in key areas of the Church's life. These would primarily report to the Conference through the Connexional Council and would principally be three:

- a) Ministries
- b) Mission
- c) Finance and Property

The following paragraphs set out the broad parameters of the work of each of the three key committees.

a) Ministries Committee:

Purpose: "To enable the Church to develop and maintain strategic vision for the use of ordained, commissioned and informal ministries and offices throughout the Connexion." (SO 32A1). It will develop and support the processes relating to the policy of stationing, oversight, accountability and professional development of these ministries and offices of the Church. It will bring together all aspects of stationing, selection of ministerial candidates and training of ministers and the links to the recognised training centres. Various aspects of chaplaincy stationing will be under this Committee. It will oversee the Local Preachers' training programme.

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It will be appointed by the Conference and primarily report to it through the Connexional Council.

Stationing will continue to be the work of the Conference. However, the Ministries Committee will be responsible for stationing policy and will bring together related aspects of stationing scrutiny, action, and advisory services so as not to have separate committees for each. The Conference will retain responsibility for the stationing of its ministers through direct reports from those bodies which are responsible for matching ministers and probationers to appointments. Similarly, the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee and the Local Preachers Board of Studies will report to the Ministries Committee on the development of policy in these areas.

It will relate closely to the work of the Ministries Team and receive reports from it and other bodies.

b) Mission Committee:

Purpose: Its primary task will be to ensure the mission and activities of the Church are in keeping with the response to *Our Calling* and agreed priorities. It will enable the Church to take up various aspects of Mission as expressed in Part 10 of Standing Orders. It will explore the challenges and opportunities faced by the Church for mission in Britain in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith context that is society today. It will bring together the work on Global Relationships (the place of the Methodist Church in the world, relationships with partner Churches and the worldwide Methodist and United Church family) and activities related to mission in Britain (evangelism and growth, fellowship groups, mission education, chaplaincy, children and youth, A Methodist Way of Life and the Church's commitment to social justice and tackling climate change). It will oversee and support the work on Inclusion, Justice and Diversity (EDI) in the Church. It will promote the One Mission concept and contribute to the theology and understanding of mission in the Church. It will help to equip and resource people for mission throughout the Church, building confidence in British Methodists as disciples of Jesus to rediscover a passion and commitment for mission and evangelism.

It will be appointed by the Conference and primarily report to it through the Connexional Council. It will receive reports from the Mission team (and others) and work closely with the team but not manage it. It will have supportive sub-committees or task forces under it such as the Global Relationships Committee, the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the Fellowship Groups Oversight Committee, the Methodist Modern Art Management Committee, the Methodist

Heritage Committee and the Methodist Schools Committee.

c) Finance and Property Committee:

This committee will advise and support the Connexional Council in its responsibility for the strategic use of the Church's resources in keeping with its mission and priorities. It will focus on finances, personnel, property, and technology and ensure the Church fulfils the requirements of charity law/the Charity Commission, good governance, and statutory expectations of the Church as a charity and as an organisation. It will ensure the Connexional Council fulfils its legal duties and obligations as a model employer and a place where people can work in a healthy and safe environment. It will also scrutinise and recommend a budget to the Connexional Council based on the guidelines set by it and the Conference. It will also scrutinise and recommend the annual accounts and help prepare an annual report for the charity. It will review investment management of the funds of the Church.

It will be appointed by the Conference and primarily report to the Connexional Council. It will support the staff teams but not manage them. It will support the audit process. It will have two committees reporting to it:

- The Connexional Property Committee: This will oversee and manage connexional properties. It will work on the supervision of connexional manses and include the work of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee.
- The Connexional Remuneration, Pay and Allowances Committee: This will cover the allowances paid to ministers (the work of the present Connexional Allowances Committee CAC), remuneration, pay and grading for lay staff and ensure that there are policies and practices for good staff relations, safety and wellbeing of people working for the Church. Some aspects of the management of specific funds connected with the CAC could be transferred to the staff.

Appendix 2 shows a provisional outline diagram of the suggested inter-relation of the committee structure.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 30/7. The Conference directs the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to continue its work of reviewing the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing**

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Orders to the 2022 Conference.

6. Size of the Conference

Resolution 25/3: The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a review of the size of the Conference as required under SO 100(2) and to report with recommendations for any changes to the 2021 Conference.

- 6.1 The 2020 Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a review of the size of the Conference as required under SO 100(2) and to report with recommendations for any changes to the 2021 Conference. The Council established a working party to undertake this work; the working party reported as requested in March to the Council (MC/21/38).
- 6.1 The working party reviewed the size and constitution of the Conference but recommended that in the light of the other work contained in this report, now was not the time to make any change (the report of that group to the Council is shown at Appendix 3). However, the Council agreed that further work to reduce the size of the Conference needed to be done as a matter of urgency (and not therefore left for another five years) and recommended to the Conference that those working on Oversight and Trusteeship should bear in mind both the principles described in the report and the ideas as to how Conference members might, in the future, most effectively participate in the governance of the Church and the furtherance of its mission. The Council received the report, noting the issues raised by the group (including the careful consideration that there needs to be to balance representation from the Districts and ex officio membership with questions about diversity and inclusion) and stressed the need for economies to be achieved in the size of the Conference. The Council urged that at an early stage of any further work on the size of the Conference, either by those working on Oversight and Trusteeship, or by a future working group convened for that purpose, should explore these matters including possible changes which might need amendments to the Deed Of Union .

***RESOLUTIONS

- 30/8. The Conference receives the report of the group convened under SO 100(2).**
- 30/9. The Conference directs that the Council appoints a group to undertake further work to reduce the size of the Conference, and to review its constitution and its ways of working, and to report with recommendations to the 2022 Conference.**

7. District Reviews and Mission Plans

Resolution 25/6: The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that each District reviews its mission plan, committee structure and ways of working and considers its findings alongside other Districts in a regional grouping.

Resolution 25/7: The Conference directed the Council to appoint a task group to receive reports from regional groups and to report to the 2021 Conference with proposals for change from 2022 onwards.

- 7.1 As laid out in SO 400A(i), “the primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region”. This provides opportunities for them to work together and support each other in areas such as finance and expertise that may not be available locally.
- 7.2 In accordance with resolution 25/7 of the 2020 Conference, the Council appointed a task group, named the District Review Monitoring Group (DRMG), in October 2020.
- 7.3 The Terms of Reference offered to the Council for how the task group operated are as follows:
- To ensure that all Districts engage in conversations alongside others about regional ways of working, and that the areas in paragraph 7 above have been considered.
 - To offer regional groups guidance and frameworks for conversations to take place using best practice (arranging meetings to be supported by Connexional Team staff).
 - To receive reports from regional groups on proposals for the future, and to offer feedback from a connexional viewpoint on what has been proposed.
 - No later than March 2021, to report to the Council on the outcome of the conversations of regional groups making recommendations for the Conference of 2021 for change to take place in 2022.
 - To present to the Council proposals for how a successor body will continue to oversee District regional conversations beyond 2021-22.
- 7.4 It was noted that there are a number of District Chairs’ invitations that end in 2022. It was proposed that in those Districts a short term appointment is sought noting that changes to District boundaries and structures are possible in the future. The Secretary of the Conference wrote to all Districts inviting them to work with the Conference Office on the most appropriate timing for the discernment

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process given the work detailed in this paper.¹⁵

7.5 The DMRG has received updates of conversations that have taken place across nine regional groupings. The conversations have included analysing of what work could be done collaboratively, assessing the life of the District over the next few years and identifying which aspects of the discussions should be taken forward.

7.6 The highlights of each conversation are listed in the table below:

Name	Districts involved	Highlights from conversation so far
North West & Mann	Lancashire	Having considered each District's mission plan to establish any similarities and convergences, the NW & Mann Review Group has agreed to set up a sub-group to re-draw the map. A process is being established for the sub-group to bring proposals to the NW & Mann Review Group. Recommendations will then be made to DPCs and Synods by Spring 2022.
	Bolton and Rochdale	
	Manchester and Stockport	
	Chester and Stoke	
	Liverpool	
	Isle of Man	
	Cumbria	
West Midlands	Birmingham	Representatives of the two Districts are now meeting regularly and beginning to implement integrated ways of working (for instance Safeguarding provision will be held in common across the geography of the two Districts from the next connexional year). There is an expectation that continued progress may lead to a shared identity by 2025.
	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	

¹⁵ MC/20/103

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East Midlands	Northampton	The regional oversight group is implementing the areas of cooperation around LP/WL training and ongoing development. Probationers, Vocations, Mission enablers, Early years, and Resources. The group is developing issues around leadership in the region and a mapping exercise is being undertaken of the roles of the Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Assistant Chairs to develop ideas about co-/team-working. The Synod has debated and agreed interim arrangements for the Chair's post for 2022-24 (see paragraph 7.9 below). Medium and long term goals have also been agreed.
	Nottingham and Derby	
	Lincolnshire	
	East Anglia	
South West	Plymouth and Exeter	Further conversation will be taking place regarding the possibility of different regional groupings for Safeguarding, Learning Network, and Stationing. Conversations are also continuing between all five districts over areas of cooperation.
	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	
	Bristol	
	Southampton	
	Channel Islands	
Wales	Wales	A proposal has been prepared for the Spring Synods of the two Districts and a report will be made to the Council in October 2021.
	Cymru	
Yorkshire	Sheffield	The substantial work undertaken in 2016/17 has provided a Yorkshire Plus District structure which is bedding in effectively and providing appropriate models of District life to fulfil SO 400A. The group is committed to further explore opportunities for shared and federated working in partnership with the Yorkshire Plus Learning Network.
	Yorkshire North and East	
	Yorkshire West	
North East	Darlington	Conversations have highlighted the good model of co-operative partnership and working already in place and on which the Districts continue to build without any appetite to merge.
	Newcastle	

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South East	Beds, Essex & Herts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● London will take forward the conversation about leadership and undertake a review. ● The SE district will rewrite its mission plan and share it. ● There is no appetite for boundary change but important that across the three districts there are significant cohorts (eg of probationers) to make meetings profitable.
	London	
	South East	
Scotland and Shetland	Scotland Shetland	Already working together as two Districts sharing a Chair

7.7 The table illustrates the way in which conversations have developed differently in different regions. This is not unexpected and accords with the desire for any decision about change to be made in a way that is both contextual and consensual. However, as stated in SO 401(2) “All proposals for the division or amalgamation of Districts or other changes in their composition shall be considered by the Methodist Council, which shall consult the Synods and Circuit Meetings involved, formulate a draft recommendation, obtain the resolutions of the Synods and Circuit Meetings on that draft and report those resolutions to the Conference with its own substantive recommendation.” The Council, therefore, will need to consider proposals (as it did with the conversations in Wales) in order for formal consultation with the Synods to take place. The conversations in a number of places are moving towards considering how Districts might be reconfigured within the regional grouping (a process that invariably looks to a reduction in the number of Districts and/ or Chairs). The Council will therefore be asked to consider proposals relating to all Districts in October 2021 and January 2022 and possibly at subsequent meetings.

7.8 Some of the conversations have led to imaginative proposals that provide for periods of experimentation. From the conversations in the South-West, the DPCs of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District and the Plymouth and Exeter District have asked that the two Chairs currently serving their districts both be stationed to serve both Districts for 2021-2022. This is an experimental step towards a different form of leadership in that region.

7.9 In the East Midlands, the Nottingham and Derby District have asked that the Conference does not make a new appointment of a District Chair to replace the Revd Loraine Mellor in September 2022 but that a Chair of a District within the region be stationed as Chair for a two-year interim period with the appointment of a Deputy Chair in the District. The post of Deputy Chair was advertised and a

discernment process was completed which led to a nomination to the Synod for a presbyter to be stationed to serve 20% in a circuit and 80% as Deputy Chair.

- 7.10 The conversations in the East Midlands have highlighted the different ways in which the role of Deputy or Assistant Chair has been understood. The Conference is therefore asked to direct the Council to consider revisions to SO 426 in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee and Faith and Order Committee to provide for the appointment of Deputy Chairs and Assistants, to allow for greater flexibility and wider discernment in interim appointments.
- 7.11 Resolution 25/6 of the 2020 Conference directed “the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that each District reviews its mission plan, committee structure and ways of working and considers its findings alongside other Districts in a regional grouping”. Resolution 25/6a directed “that within the process of reviewing mission plans, committee structures and ways of working at district Level, equality and diversity will be taken into consideration, and that any persons responsible for appointing new members to those committees will undertake Unconscious Bias related training”. In the light of these two resolutions, the following processes will now need to come into effect:
- Three years before a reinvitation of a District Chair can be sought, on 1 September the Conference Office will remind the Synod that such reflections are required and preparations must take place for this to happen;
 - As the Conference has directed that Districts must reflect with others about ways of working, no Districts will be allowed to re-advertise before the process is concluded;
 - The task group (under the 2020 Conference resolution 25/7) will ensure that conversations take place using the framework/guidelines mentioned above. This will involve the task group offering some feedback to the regional group on what is proposed;
 - The task group will then report on the outcome to the Council.
- 7.12 This effectively envisages that the task group whose creation was directed by the 2020 Conference will need to have a continuing life or a successor body as the process of regular District reviews becomes embedded in our practice. The Council agreed to recommend that a successor body be established.
- 7.13 The DRMG in reporting to the Council noted disparity in the mission plans operational in the District. There has been some confusion about what is required and the Council agreed to recommend that Standing Orders be amended so that the Development Masterplan (required by the current SO 962) forms a part of the District Mission Plan, and is updated annually and that the District Mission

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Plan is included in the information that Synod Secretaries submit annually to the Conference Office. Given that District Mission Plans are not at present included in the Standing Orders, the Conference is therefore asked to direct the Law and Polity Committee to redraft SO 962 to reflect the needs identified by the DRMG's report.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 30/10. The Conference directs the Council to review SO 426, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, and to consider whether revisions are required in the light of this work.**
- 30/11. The Conference directs that the Council appoints a successor body to the District Review Monitoring Group to receive reports on regional conversations and to bring proposals under SO 401(2) on the reconfiguration of Districts to the Council.**
- 30/12. The Conference directs that Districts are not permitted to readvertise for the appointment of a District Chair until a full process of reflection with others has been completed and reported to the District Review Monitoring Group.**

8. The Local Church

Resolution 25/1: The Conference welcomed and affirmed the ethos and direction of the Report's section on local church trusteeship, and supported the suggestion that raising the minimum size for a Local Church will assist Circuits to coordinate their mission. The Conference, therefore, directed the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to ensure that a review of Standing Order 605 (1) and (2) takes place and that a proposal is brought to the 2021 Conference to raise the minimum size for a Local Church, together with examples of creative ways in which one Church on multiple sites and/or federations of classes under a united Church Council can enable local missional communities to flourish. In the light of this, and to maximise the potential fruitfulness of all Circuits' use of their resources, the Conference further directed all Circuit Meetings to review the number of Church Councils in the Circuit and encourages Church Councils to work together to determine the best way of working to achieve the minimum number of trustee bodies necessary to fulfil its calling.

- 8.1 Resolution 25/1 placed responsibility on the Methodist Council, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, firstly to review and recommend an appropriate increase in the minimum size for a Local Church, and secondly to provide examples of creative ways of working at the local level. To help assist the

January meeting of the Methodist Council, the Law and Polity Committee offered a report indicating its initial considerations and proposals for achieving what might be helpful (which have now been developed). The proposals are also intended to assist Circuit Meetings and Church Councils with their ongoing responsibilities under resolution 25/1 to review and determine the minimum number of trustee bodies required to fulfil their callings.

Minimum Size

- 8.2 At its January 2021 meeting through a focus group and in plenary, the Methodist Council discussed the question of the minimum size for a Local Church, recognising that membership is not simply about numbers, but about discipleship and how a Local Church is living out its mission in a particular context. The issues relating to the exercise of local trusteeship were recognised, and the need to help churches in discerning their calling to determine the shape of governance that works in their particular context.
- 8.3 The Council considered and received the paper from the Law and Polity Committee, which noted that:
- a) at present Standing Orders 605(1) and (2) provide different minimum numbers for forming a new Local Church (twelve) and for below which a Local Church is no longer recognised as such (six). Given the focus of the 2020 Conference Report on Trusteeship and Oversight, the Committee saw no reason to reduce the minimum number for formation (but has now taken the opportunity to develop the Standing Orders to clarify and facilitate the process of forming a new church).
 - b) As for the minimum number below which a Local Church ceases to be recognised as such, the Committee noted, on the one hand, the desire to relieve smaller causes of some of the burdens of trusteeship, and to bring larger numbers into engagement and decision making for taking mission forwards, as drivers for raising minimum numbers and encouraging greater sectional working; whilst on the other hand, neighbouring churches or the Circuit may only have finite capacity for taking on additional trusteeship, and, subsidiarity remains important since congregations are often more motivated when they have responsibility as disciples for their own chapel and – in reality or perception – control over their own affairs, engendering a counter argument against changing or raising the minimum number too high.
 - c) Recognising it was a matter of policy for the Council to recommend and the Conference to determine, the Committee itself preferred the minimum

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number to be twelve, to reflect the balancing considerations and to provide parity with the minimum number required for forming a new Local Church. Also, not exceeding twelve would avoid, so far as the Committee could foresee, any unintended negative consequence on other provisions within CPD, which higher numbers might have. (Additionally, the creative possibility of voluntarily extending the minimum numbers, as described below, would allow for the option of choosing a higher minimum number where desired, but without imposing a minimum of more than twelve where unwelcome, and this was a further factor in thinking about the overall best balance.)

- d) Although not referred to in resolution 25/1, the Committee also considered the related issue of the minimum size of Church Councils in Standing Order 612, which enables Circuit Meetings to enable even the smallest Local Churches to have adequate Church Councils. However, even if the minimum numbers for a Local Church are raised, the Committee saw no reason for suggesting any material change, since not increasing the minimum threshold for a Church Council would allow flexibility, either between the possibility of the local body of trustees being distinctly smaller than the (proposed new) Local Church minimum number, or (when the option under Standing Orders 610(1)(x) and (2) is exercised) of the Church Council being a more similar size, depending on whichever may be more helpful in a particular context.
- e) Subsequent to the January Council, the Committee also considered the reference in Standing Order 605 to those who are “locally resident”, and whether this might be widened or alternatively more closely defined than as presently set out in 605(3). However, the Committee advises against this at this time, so as to continue to allow careful reflection in each Circuit’s context as to how “locally resident” might be most sensibly understood and applied, including as part of the process of considering what might be the minimum number of trustee bodies required. (If at any stage the Conference prefers to establish instead a wider or a narrower understanding, this can of course be developed.)
- 8.4 The Council recognised the significance of the minimum numbers for a Local Church to many Circuits, and that to move too quickly to a much higher number than six might prove disruptive, whereas to leave things as they are would be to continue with the current frustrations. After further consideration at its March meeting, the Council therefore proposed that the minimum number for the continued recognition of a Local Church should be raised to twelve, and the proposed revised Standing Orders reflect this.
- 8.5 Where a Local Church’s membership falls below the minimum specified number, the current Standing Order 605(4) has a compulsory effect, in that automatically

it is then no longer recognised as a Local Church and “is constituted as a Class” in another church. However, the words quoted above do not appear in the proposed amendments, and it is important to stress that whilst the former Local Church may no longer be entitled to be recognised as a separate Local Church, its members will still have an identity within a wider, often multi-site, church. The proposed Standing Order revisions have sought to emphasise this principle, including that the former Local Church’s pastoral identity will remain for as long as is deemed appropriate, whilst also clarifying and making more explicit the responsibility of the Circuit Meeting in this scenario. In any event, in all such situations, sensitive pastoral and missional conversations are imperative, including to help understanding and commitment to joint working, and recognition that the whole Church’s missional and pastoral endeavour is wider than that of any one unit (reflecting our connexional nature, and that we are all branches of the one vine (John 15:5)).

Creative Ways

- 8.6 The importance of supportive pastoral and discerning missional conversations applies equally in the development of creative ways through which Circuits and Local Churches may organise their life and work together. As directed by resolution 25/1, this was the second area considered by the Methodist Council and the Law and Polity Committee. To assist, Districts were asked to provide possible examples. Those received were collated, and with other illustrations already known were provisionally analysed by the Law and Polity Committee to help determine possible changes to Standing Orders, in order to help facilitate creative ways of working.
- 8.7 The Law and Polity Committee’s analyses, proposals and cautions were offered to the January Council. They are summarised below.
- a) In analysing the creative examples, the Committee realised that fundamentally two types of model or scenario existed for multi-site churches and shared trusteeship, and that virtually all examples fall into one (or occasionally a combination) of these. Both types involve and allow for multi-site working, so the Standing Orders being proposed are potentially available for each, although one type is likely to use some of the provisions more than the other. In any event, the distinction that is apparent may be helpful for understanding and responding to the particular dynamics that are likely to be present or needing to be cared for in each scenario. Although particular terms have been used to describe each type, this is not material (as will be further acknowledged later), since the proposed Standing Orders do not need to distinguish between them, as, once again, some of the provisions can be

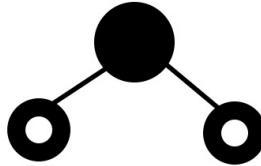
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utilised in either case.

- i. A 'hub' or 'satellite' model is where one or more smaller congregations become a Class (or a small number of Classes) attached to a larger congregation, which will often then provide the bulk or occasionally all of the receiving Church Council.

One creative example involved two small congregations becoming, in effect, satellites of a larger church. The first small congregation retained its rural chapel but resolved to merge with and become a Class of a larger church in a nearby town. Additionally, the larger church also took under its wing a second small rural congregation which, in that case, applied to cease to worship and to dispose of their chapel (delegating responsibility for this to the Circuit Leadership Team). This released any responsibility for further maintenance, and on disposal released significant funds for other work. The second congregation transferred their membership to, and become another Class of, the larger Church, yet continued to meet separately on Sundays for worship through the Circuit Plan as a fellowship meeting in members' homes. Thus, two different routes led to two smaller congregations continuing their worship and identity (including retaining former names with minimal adaptations), with one retaining and the other leaving their chapels. In each case, the smaller congregation became a satellite of the receiving hub church, with trustee responsibilities taken up by the larger Church Council, to which representatives of the smaller congregations were invited. Some local church stewards and other officers continued in the smaller congregations, but responsibilities were now shared with the larger and more resourced congregation, who were willing to take on the smaller ones as part of their wider mission. Finance and assessments were worked out in a phased and fair way.

These arrangements might be diagrammatically represented in simple terms as follows, with the smaller Class satellites indicated by the clear-centred circles, and the receiving hub church indicated by the filled in circle (and itself consisting of a number Classes). Similar but slightly different diagrams might be provided for other hub and satellite type configurations.

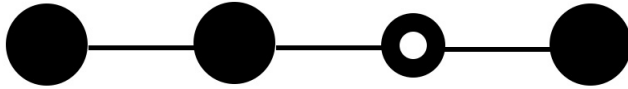


- ii. A 'sectional' or 'cluster' model is where two or more congregations merge to become a multi-site church, whether of similar small, or large, or varying, sizes, but with the intention of sharing responsibilities and mission together. It might be distinguished from the hub model perhaps because there are more similar sized congregations involved, but certainly there would be more evenness of contribution and endeavour (rather than relying more heavily on a single relatively larger congregation, as in the hub model).

One received example involved all the former congregations of a small Circuit (covering a market town and various disparate villages) becoming a single church co-terminus with the Circuit, and making use of and operating according to Standing Order 511. The former congregations adopted a new common name, albeit often also described in connection with each particular location (i.e., '[name of the multi-site church] at [the particular location]'). On account of coming together, there was sufficient capacity and pooled resource for the new merged church to retain, for example, an otherwise redundant chapel and to use it for mission purposes; this might not otherwise have been possible. Subsequently, the small Circuit is now merging with another Circuit but retaining its sectional church arrangements, which will also be providing a template for the sections of the joining Circuit which will similarly be merged into multi-site churches, so as to streamline and facilitate the trusteeship and mission of the new Circuit as a whole.

Diagrammatically, a sectional model might be represented in simple terms as follows, in this case with a number of filled circles indicating the larger congregations that consist of more than one Class, whilst in one location there is but a single Class. Again, the precise configurations and numbers involved will vary according to context, but again the sectional model fundamentally involves a merging to pool, coordinate and prioritise resources and mission across multiple sites and areas.

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- b) In considering what might help to facilitate creative ways such as these, the Law and Polity Committee recommended that, beyond their compulsory aspects, the current Standing Orders 605(4) and 942(1) should be extended to allow churches voluntarily to opt into the provisions, even when their memberships exceed the specified minimum numbers. Such schemes can be achieved simply by the relevant Circuit Meeting and Church Councils passing concurring resolutions. This would more easily enable more multi-site churches to come into being (whether with one or more chapels), and to operate under a single trustee body, the Church Council of the merged church. The Standing Orders propose that one of the former churches is identified as the “receiving church”, which for administrative and other reasons is generally more straightforward than requiring a brand new church to come into being. Nevertheless, sensitive conversations and conduct will again be required, although it can also be noted that, since concurring resolutions are required by the Circuit Meeting and each Church Council involved, the power and responsibility for entering into such a voluntary scheme is therefore shared between all the parties involved.
- c) In either hub or sectional schemes, the chapels of former churches can be retained or let go (but where a chapel is let go, there is still the option of the former congregation continuing to meet for fellowship and regular worship in, for example, a community hall or a home). Where a chapel is retained for worship, the election if possible of at least one local church steward is proposed.
- d) Since a principal motive for change concerned the burden of trusteeship and the need for stronger bodies of managing trustees, the Committee considered the question of hiving off or delegating some trustee functions to separate or particular bodies appointed for the purpose. However, responsibility for finance and property would need to remain with the merged Church Council if the dangers of the pre-1977 division of powers were to be avoided. (Until 16 April 1977, the affairs of every Methodist Local Church were managed by two separate and independent bodies, each with its own sources of funding and financial responsibilities. The “Trustees” held and managed the chapel and any other properties, and the “Leaders Meeting” (who were in law also trustees, but never described as such) were responsible for the worshipping, fellowship, pastoral and all other aspects

of the church's life and, through the circuit assessment, for the upkeep of the ministry. That division of responsibility was increasingly, and in the end overwhelmingly, found to be deeply unsatisfactory, and it was the primary motivation for and purpose of the Methodist Church Act 1976 to abolish it. Since then, the Church Council "has authority and oversight over the whole area of the ministry of the church, including the management of its property" (Standing Order 603.) The Committee therefore cautioned against undermining the Conference's previous wisdom by risking reverting to the pre-1977 split.

- e) In particular, the Committee cautioned against the idea of transferring trusteeship from the Local Church to a replacement body such as the Circuit Meeting. In constitutional terms it would be a major departure from our long-standing polity, under which at each level – Local Church, Circuit, District and Connexion – the responsible body has clear and distinct responsibilities and powers within its own sphere, while supported by the ones 'above' and to a greater or less extent accountable to them. That structure is reflected in charity law, under which each Local Church and each Circuit is a separate charity (regardless of whether or not it meets the threshold for registration as a charity). It would also, unless the Circuit Meeting took over not just the managing trusteeship but all other functions of the Church Council, again involve a regression to the pre-1977 separation of powers. Additionally, it would entail the abolition of one of the great simplicities of the Model Trust system, whereby managing trusteeship follows use, and requires no other formality. A change of that kind would therefore require the amendment not just of Standing Orders but also of paragraph 2 of the Model Trusts. For all these reasons the Committee did not consider it fruitful or necessary to pursue this line at present, nor could it see any straightforward or proportionate way of doing so. Instead, the interconnecting provisions already available in Standing Orders (for example 511 or 612), or as proposed (the proposed 605A or as in the next paragraph), if utilised, would more simply achieve much of what may be required.
- f) Whilst the Committee cautioned against transferring trusteeship away from Church Councils, it advocated strengthening the ability for trustee bodies to delegate their powers and responsibilities. The current power to delegate within Model Trust 16(1)(k) only applies when the members of the Church Council are acting as managing trustees of property or of model trust money. In order to be able also to delegate responsibilities in other areas such as pastoral care, service and evangelism, an expansion of Standing Order 642(2) is proposed. Thus, in the context either of a merged Church Council or more generally, Local Church trustees can consider delegating particular

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duties or responsibilities to suitable individuals, committees or groups within that church, at Circuit level, or externally, subject to retaining overall responsibility and oversight for them (which in itself would be less onerous where Church Councils are sufficiently strong, including if necessary through appropriate merging and multi-site arrangements). This may help with the managing and exercise of trustee responsibilities of various kinds, since one frequent strand in the collated creative examples related to the issue of delegation, including when joining together or pooling resources to engage and afford external resources to assist the trustee bodies in various ways relating to finance, property, and human resources (as envisaged by the 2020 Conference Oversight and Trusteeship Report).

- g) The Committee is aware of other emerging creative examples, including proposals for on-line churches and Circuits (various provisions in CPD imply that a Circuit needs at least one physically located Local Church, which may be desirable in any event), but this and other situations are being monitored in case, pending further developments and clarity regarding them, the existing and new provisions need to be further developed.
- h) Finally the Committee, as also the Council, recognised the challenges of nomenclature and terminology, including:
 - iii. a concern that, when churches become too small, they should not be told that they are somehow no longer a church. However, the precise position (in the proposed amendments) is that they cease to be entitled to be recognised as a 'Local Church'. Firstly, 'Local Church' is a term used in the 1976 Act (so cannot be changed as a general term without a new Act) that is also ubiquitously used in the Deed of Union, Model Trusts and Standing Orders. Accordingly, to replace the reference here to 'Local Church' with something else would break the link to all the other meanings and provisions in CPD for 'Local Church'. Secondly, even if the term were to be changed, the principle would still presumably be retained, that a change in arrangements is required, reducing local subsidiarity (but also the burdens of responsibility), with a risk of this still being detrimentally experienced, so that the problem would not necessarily be avoided by changing the term. Thirdly and above all, a congregation in this situation does not cease absolutely to be a church, but rather continues as a church, but now in a new, wider, and more interconnected form.
 - iv. The term 'Class' was adopted by John Wesley from the Latin 'classis' for division, used to describe one of the types of small groups that

made up a Methodist Society and in time a Local Church (ie, it does not refer to the need for teaching or being, say, a 'remedial class', for falling below the minimum threshold). The term has a long history as part of our identity, but is also widely used in our Constitutional Practice and Discipline, so to use a different term would once again break the link and unhook the provision from wider meanings and provisions in connection with 'Class'. Therefore, to seek to use a different term would not at this stage appear to be sufficiently justified. This remains so notwithstanding the Committee's initial concern that, where a former Local Church becomes a Class and their chapel is retained, the term 'Class' means a unit for care and discipleship, so it should not also become a convenient administrative label for including or presuming trustee responsibilities, which fall to the merged Church Council. Accordingly, in its drafting of the revised Standing Orders, the Committee has sought to minimise this risk (especially in the drafting of the revisions to present Standing Order 605(4)).

- v. The various descriptive terms used for the two types of multi-site church are not without issues: 'hub' is sometimes already used for other types of arrangements in Circuits; 'satellite' might be taken to mean something less central or important; 'sectional' sometimes refers to a minister's section (which may or may not be the same as that of a 'sectional' church); 'cluster' sometimes means a whole group of churches and not just a closely joined up arrangement; 'partnership' is sometimes used as an alternative, but apart from risking confusion with ecumenical or external body arrangements, to use it of one, rather than another model, risks implying that one involves a partnership and the other does not; 'federated' has been suggested, but this is a term that the Committee particularly cautions against, for it risks implying greater levels of independence (as in States v Federal rights), at the expense of interdependence, than may apply, so it would be better to avoid the term and the risk of misunderstandings around it. Thus all possible terms may be problematic. The Committee explained to the Council that it was not precious if better or more commonly used terms should emerge. In any event, because the Committee has so far avoided using any such terms in the proposed Standing Orders, which terms are used are of limited importance (save, again, it would be better not to use 'federated'). Above all, it is the adoption of creative ways of working by churches and Circuits, including along the lines suggested, that is more important than however they might be described.

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- 8.8 The principles and proposals above were principally submitted to and received by the January Council, but have continued to be refined and developed as creative examples, and reflections from the March Council and others, have continued to emerge. The reflections and findings above were also discussed at a meeting of the District Chairs, and have been kept under review by the 25/9 Coordinating Group. The Coordinating Group intends for more of the collated examples and some supportive material to be made available in suitable ways, such as via the Connexional website, even as examples continue to emerge and are explored. This is a contributory reason for the need for a continuing Co-ordinating Group next year, so as to monitor the emerging creative examples at this critical time of beginning to emerge from the pandemic, in the event that further responses and provisions are required.
- 8.9 The following resolution and amendments to Standing Orders are recommended (the passages in small type are existing or suggested editorial notes, not part of the amendments to be put to the Conference for adoption, but are included here to assist understanding).

003 Church Courts and Jurisdictions. In these Standing Orders, unless the context otherwise requires:

(vii) ‘Local Church’ means (subject to the provisions of Standing Orders 605A, and 612 **and 942**) the whole body of members of the Methodist Church connected with and attending one particular place of worship, and the word ‘church’ is sometimes used in the same sense;

601 Its Size. (1) If a church is too small, by itself, to fulfil its functions it is encouraged to seek association with its neighbours for the discharge together of the things that cannot be attempted by one church alone.

See also S.O.s 605A, 612, and 613(4).

(2) The minimum number of members for a self-governing church in the terms of Standing Orders 605 **and 605A** is set at a very low figure to meet the need of sparsely populated areas; in general it is to be desired that much larger numbers be achieved.

605 Formation and Cessation. (1) No new Local Church shall be formed, nor former church reconstituted, having less than twelve persons who are locally resident and **are will** either **be** members of that church or **be** actively committed to its life as ministers not in the active work. **Any such person who is not a minister must be a member of an existing Local Church or in another Methodist Connexion, or must be a candidate for membership who has successfully completed training.**

For the former clauses (2) and (4) see now 605A(1), and for clause (5) see 605A(8).

(3) For the purpose of clause (1) a person **and of Standing Order 605A(1)** is locally resident if resident in such a place that the Local Church in question is a natural centre for worship or fellowship.

(4) When the requirements of clause (1) above are met, and the Circuit Meeting of the Circuit in which the proposed Local Church will be located is also satisfied that suitable arrangements are in place or can be made for its worship, the Circuit Meeting may by resolution form it, and those persons within clause (1) above who can be transferred as members shall thereby be transferred to the new church.

(5) Upon forming a new church under clause (4) above the Circuit Meeting shall have power to, and shall, despite any conflicting powers of appointment in Section 61, 62 or 63, appoint its first Church Council, with a membership complying with Standing Order 610 or 612(1), as the case may be.

(6) That Church Council shall forthwith consider under clause 8, (b) and (e)(ii), of the Deed of Union and Standing Order 050(4) and 051(3) the admission of any candidates for membership, and if thought fit approve.

(7) It shall continue in office only until the new church can, by the ordinary procedures and through the ordinary appointing bodies, make the appointments necessary for the formation of a normal Church Council.

605A Cessation and Merger. (2) (1) When, in any Local Church, the number of locally resident persons within clause (1) above who are members or actively committed to its life as ministers not in the active work falls below six twelve, and so continues for four successive quarters, that church shall cease to be entitled to be recognised as a Local Church and the Circuit Meeting shall at its next meeting close it and transfer any remaining members to another designated Local Church in that or (by agreement with the other Circuit Meeting) another Circuit.

For the meaning of “locally resident” see S.O. 605(3).

The reference to “remaining” members recognises that when cessation under this provision is imminent some members may choose to be transferred to a Local Church other than that designated.

This ‘closure’ or cessation of the Local Church (i.e. its membership) should be clearly distinguished from closure of its chapel, which is an entirely separate matter, and may or may not be happening.

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(4) Where by reason of the operation of clause (2) above a Local Church ceases to be recognised as such, the members shall be constituted as a Class and placed under the care of a leader, who may be chosen from their number or from the wider membership of the Local Church to which the Class is attached. A number of such Classes in a neighbourhood may constitute a Local Church or such a Class may be attached to a larger church, either neighbouring or central, but so that in either case there shall be a Church Council and Pastoral Committee sufficient to undertake the oversight of the members and the training of new members envisaged in this Part and Section 05.

(2) Whether or not clause (1) above would or might otherwise apply any Local Church may, under a scheme agreed between its Church Council, the Church Councils of any other Local Churches involved and the Circuit Meeting or Circuit Meetings, merge with one or more other Local Churches to form a single Local Church consisting of all the members of the constituent former churches. Such a scheme shall come into effect when adopted by resolutions of all those bodies.

Such a scheme may take a variety of forms. In particular it may provide for the church formed by the merger to continue to worship in one or more of the existing chapels, and if more than one the scheme will in that respect be similar to one under S.O. 942(1), q.v.. If any existing chapels are closed then (although it need not be formally provided for in the scheme) members who formerly worshipped there may still wish to meet from time to time for consultation, fellowship, worship or other purposes at some suitable location.

(3) Where possible the merger shall be effected by the transfer to one of the constituent former churches (which may be suitably renamed) of the members of all the others, in which case the transferee church shall be one whose chapel, whether existing or new, continues to be in regular use for worship.

It is also desirable that the transferee church shall, where that is possible and is compatible with other requirements, be one already registered as a charity under any applicable legislation.

(4) Where clause (1) or (2) above applies the provisions of the following clauses shall have effect, and in them "the new church" means the transferee church under clause (1) or the merged church under clause (2).

(5) Each former church shall retain its pastoral identity for so long as is deemed appropriate, and in any event for so long as its chapel continues to be in regular use for worship, by the continuation of its constituent Class or Classes under their leaders or pastoral visitors and in other appropriate ways.

(6) The members of full age of the Church Council of the new church shall, in accordance with Standing Orders 940 and 941, exercise their responsibilities as managing trustees of all its chapels and other local property and the Church Council and church

treasurer shall exercise their responsibilities for all the finances of the new church, but consideration shall be given to the delegation of other specified functions to bodies representing the members of one or more of the constituent former churches, in particular where more chapels than one continue to be in regular use for worship, and where appropriate provision shall be made for such delegation in the scheme agreed under clause (2) above or by the Church Council itself.

(7) In electing church stewards the General Church Meeting of the new church shall take into account the scope for representation across the membership of former churches, and in particular the desirability of there being at least one steward from each chapel.

~~(5)~~ **(8)** The provision of opportunity for public worship for such Classes **all the members of the new church** shall be kept under review by the Circuit Meeting which, in deciding whether or how often to sustain services in **each** chapels—where there is a Class but no Local Church; shall take into consideration the possibilities of growth in the area, the ecumenical situation, the sufficiency of numbers to form a worshipping congregation, facilities for travel and the stewardship of the resources of the Circuit and of the services of preachers.

612 Minimum Size.

(2) When the procedure in clause (1) above has been followed for two successive years the Circuit Meeting may apply to that church the procedure set out in Standing Order 605A(1), so that the church will become a Class within **members will be transferred to** another church. The Church Council of the church thus united will take on all the responsibilities of both Church Councils.

642 Discretionary Appointments and Powers.

(2) The council may delegate to any of its committees **or to any other body which it may appoint** any of its powers, except appointments under Standing Order 641, the approval of persons for membership of the Methodist Church and the accreditation of workers among children and young people under Standing Order 661.

942 Local Churches and Chapels. (1) There may be more than one chapel used by or in connection with one Local Church, but only (i) where Standing Order 605A(4) **(1)** is in operation, or (ii) under a scheme adopted by the Church Council and the Circuit Meeting **under this Standing Order, or (iii) under a scheme within Standing Order 605A(2).**

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***RESOLUTION

30/13. The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out in paragraph 8.9 of this Report.

9. Discernment and Selection

Resolution 25/5: The Conference directed the Ministries Committee to bring proposals for a discernment proposal for senior posts, to bring interim proposals to the 2021 Conference, and to bring a full report with proposed changes to Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.

9.1 *The Nature of Oversight* noted that the expression of oversight exercised by individuals and that exercised by the corporate bodies of the Church are intrinsically linked and interdependent. Related to the way in which a refined oversight structure of the Church operates, therefore, is the appropriate exercise of personal episcopate, so the 2020 Conference recognized the vital task of discerning the calling and gifts of those who can most appropriately serve in senior roles in the Connexion and entrusted consideration of this matter to the Ministries Committee.

9.2 The Ministries Committee received a report in February which indicated a suggested way of entry as follows.

9.3 *For the Ordained:*

As part of the annual MDR cycle or Supervision, ministers should be encouraged to reflect on their vocation, considering prior experience and learning, God's call and the call of the Church. The question of "what next?" might be appropriately asked. The answer might rightly be to remain in the station in which they are currently serving. For others it might be to explore other ways of expressing their call. In the latter case, these ministers would be invited to complete an expression of interest form, which would include sharing testimony and past experience.

9.4 *For lay members of the church:*

We would encourage an annual discipleship conversation "to what is God calling you?". This could be conducted by a class leader discerning with a small group of people, or the ordained could invite such conversations, perhaps at the beginning of the Connexional year, or at the annual Covenant Service.

- 9.5 The answer to the question could, of course, be to carry on doing what they are doing or it could be to serve in another way in the Church. If there was a suggestion that this further service was at a connexional level, lay members would be encouraged to complete an expression of interest form, which would include sharing testimony and past experience. We need to acknowledge that discerning lay vocations is a less defined process, and therefore harder to identify and manage through our current processes.

The report then envisaged a process of discernment which:

- should be grounded in prayer, based on the Candidates' Selection Committee model or Chair's nominations panel;
- should include discernment of call to a pool of potential senior leadership before matching to a specific role;
- should be corporate and not individual;
- could be an accompanied discernment programme that takes place on an annual rolling basis.]

- 9.6 Following any discernment process a training programme should be offered to enable those likely to be considered for senior posts to develop their competencies. There should also be opportunity for a further conversation with a Vocations Adviser (or similar). The Conference is therefore asked to direct the Ministries Committee to develop a constitution and ways of working for a discernment panel for adoption by the Council.

*****RESOLUTION**

30/13. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to develop a constitution and ways of working for a discernment panel for adoption by the Council.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 This is a large piece of work with many strands which will continue to be progressed over the coming months. The past year has enabled some insight to be seen that gives the ability to see things in a new way and there are possibilities for the Church to develop a strategic use of its resources.
- 10.2 The Coordinating Group is grateful to all who have contributed to the conversations. The inter-relationship of the different strands of the work have added to the complexity but have also enabled rich and insightful conversations between the different bodies involved in the work. This is inevitably a long process and the

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Conference is now asked to authorise the continuation of the work by appointing a steering group to receive the reports as directed from the Law and Polity, Faith and Order and Strategy and Resources committees and to bring a further report to the 2022 Conference. The group should include representatives of all the bodies directed by the resolutions attached to this report to carry forward this work.

***RESOLUTION

- 30/14. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to convene an Oversight and Trusteeship steering group; and further directs that group to receive and consider the reports from the Ministries, Law and Polity, Faith and Order and Strategy and Resources committees and the successor body to the District Review Monitoring Group and the group doing further work on the size of the Conference as set out in this report, to ensure that future proposals are comprehensive and coherent, and to bring a full report with recommendations to the 2022 Conference.**

Nominations for the group to be brought on the Order Paper.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 30/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 30/2. The Conference adopts *Our Calling* as the primary strategic driver for the Church's work.**
- 30/3. The Conference affirms the Methodist Council objectives as set out in paragraph 2.8.**
- 30/4. The Conference receives the Report of the Law and Polity Committee in response to Resolution 25/2 of the Conference 2020.**
- 30/5. The Conference directs that the Report of the Law and Polity Committee be taken into account in any work undertaken to carry forward the recommendations in Part 4 of the 2020 Conference report.**
- 30/6. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee and as appropriate with others:**
- a) to consider the functions, powers and responsibilities that should be

given to the Connexional Council to enable it to become the connexional trustee body whilst ensuring that the Conference remains as the governing body of the Methodist Church in Great Britain;

- b) to consider which functions, powers and responsibilities should be given to the Connexional Council in order to replace and abolish the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee, yet also to consider whether any of the present functions, powers and responsibilities of those bodies should be given instead, as may be necessary or appropriate, to the Conference or other Connexional Committee or body; and to prepare and bring to the Conference of 2022 the special and other resolutions to give effect to a) and b) above, together with the necessary amendments including to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.

- 30/7. The Conference directs the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to continue its work of reviewing the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.
- 30/8. The Conference receives the report of the group convened under SO 100(2).
- 30/9. The Conference directs that the Council appoints a group to undertake further work to reduce the size of the Conference, and to review its constitution and its ways of working, and to report with recommendations to the 2022 Conference.
- 30/10. The Conference directs the Council to review SO 426, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, and to consider whether revisions are required in the light of this work.
- 30/11. The Conference directs that the Council appoints a successor body to the District Review Monitoring Group to receive reports on regional conversations and to bring proposals under SO 401(2) on the reconfiguration of Districts to the Council.
- 30/12. The Conference directs that Districts are not permitted to readvertise for the appointment of a District Chair until a full process of reflection with others has been completed and reported to the District Review Monitoring Group.
- 30/13. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to develop a constitution and ways of working for a discernment panel for adoption by the Council.

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30/14. The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to convene an Oversight and Trusteeship steering group; and further directs that group to receive and consider the reports from the Ministries, Law and Polity, Faith and Order and Strategy and Resources committees and the successor body to the District Review Monitoring Group and the group doing further work on the size of the Conference as set out in this report, to ensure that future proposals are comprehensive and coherent, and to bring a full report with recommendations to the 2022 Conference.

Nominations for the group to be brought on the Order Paper.

Appendix 1

Notice of Motion 2018/201: Models of Trusteeship

The Conference, mindful that the Circuit is the primary unit of mission policy and has a particular responsibility to ensure the faithful deployment of resources, directs the Methodist Council to explore alternative models of managing trusteeship and bring to the Conference no later than in 2020 proposals that would enable other bodies to more easily hold trusteeship of Local Churches, after due process.

The Conference adopted the Motion.

M17 (2019) Application of policies

The Melton Mowbray (23/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 26; Voting: 21 for, 1 against) raises concerns that the Methodist Church has become too bureaucratic.

Whilst recognising the need to comply with statutory legislation and acknowledging past mistakes, the Methodist Church's current requirements for churches in relation to safeguarding, data protection (GDPR) and Premises Hire Licenses are so complex and time consuming that they impact on the real work of the Church of mission, worship and outreach. The duties of Safeguarding, Data Protection Officers are so onerous that it is increasingly difficult to find members willing to fulfil these roles. Churches and Circuits are resorting to employing staff to do them which uses scarce resources and again impacts on the Church's ability to fulfil its purpose.

Fundamental principles are that all procedures and documentation should be user friendly and minimise administration time. We ask the Conference to reconsider the application of these policies in practice and the negative impact they are having on the work of the Church and its members.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Melton Mowbray Circuit for its memorial and for raising the important issue of support for managing trustees in respect of data protection, safeguarding and licenses.

The Conference recognises the ever increasing regulatory burden placed on managing trustees and the need to employ people for roles that might have once been undertaken by a volunteer. This situation is not however unique to the Methodist Church nor is it Methodist policies that are necessarily leading to all the increased burdens. The Connexional Team makes every effort to assist managing trustees in meeting the regulatory compliance and best practice through precedent documents and policies. The Conference reaffirms that safeguarding work is a vital part of the Methodist Church's response to the love of God. It is an integral part of the Methodist Church's witness to God through Jesus Christ as it seeks to be a community marked by love and care for one another and for all whom it encounters.

It is not within the power of the Conference to remove the regulatory burdens or legal compliance from managing trustees. However, the 2018 Conference directed the Methodist Council in response to Notice of Motion 201 to consider alternative models of managing trusteeship and to bring proposals to the Conference in 2020.

The Conference therefore declines the memorial but directs the Council to consider the concerns raised by Melton Mowbray Circuit in this memorial when reviewing alternative models of managing trusteeship.

M10 (2019) Funding a non-separated Chair

The Isle of Man District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 47; Voting: 46 for, 0 against) draws the Conference's attention to the matter of the cost of funding a non-separated Chair.

The situation with regard to non-separated Chairs has remained the same for some decades now. But it has become clear that the demands, especially those regionally and connexionally, have markedly increased their workload. We celebrate our partnership with the Districts in our region, and with the Learning Network. We recognise, however, that these, and other connexional commitments, take the Chair out of the District far more often than was the case a decade ago.

At present the second superintendents allowance paid to non-separated Chairs is paid from connexional funds, but the entirety of the rest of the stipend is paid by the District/Circuit in which the minister is stationed. Expenses are paid in the same way as any other District.

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The Synod asks the Conference to consider contributing to the stipend from connexional funds on a 50/50, half connexional and half district/circuit basis. We believe that this would further re-enforce the Chair's role as a connexional person and release other district/circuit resources to make up the shortfall in ministerial provision.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Isle of Man District Synod for the memorial.

The Synod is correct that the position regarding the funding of the stipend of a non-separated Chair has remained the same for some time. The Connexional Allowances Committee last year considered the situation as a part of its extensive review of allowances above the basic stipend and recommended that there be no change. Given, as the Synod notes, the non-separated Chair's allowance has been set at the same rate as a Superintendent's allowance (under SO 428(2)), it therefore rises to 10% in 2019.

The Synod argues that the allowance was set in a time when the expectations of a Chair was less than it now is. Non-separated Chairs participate in meetings of Chairs and the Connexional Leaders' Forum, share in all stationing matching, and contribute with their peers to the life of the Connexion in various ways. There are some responsibilities (eg, to serve on the Ministerial Candidates' Selection Committee or to represent returning Mission Partners in stationing) that have by custom fallen to the Island Chairs. The Conference is minded to agree that 10% of basic stipend seems a disproportionately small contribution in recognition of this.

The Conference therefore accepts the principle of the Memorial and mandates the Secretary of the Conference to instigate a review of the funding of the stipend arrangements for non-separated Chairs.

M11 (2019) Funding a non-separated Chair

The Channel Islands Synod, Representative Session (Present: 37; Voting: unanimous) draws the Conference's attention to the matter of the cost of funding a non-separated Chair when they live on one Island (and therefore in one Circuit) but serve both the District and the Connexion and asks the Conference to take the following action:

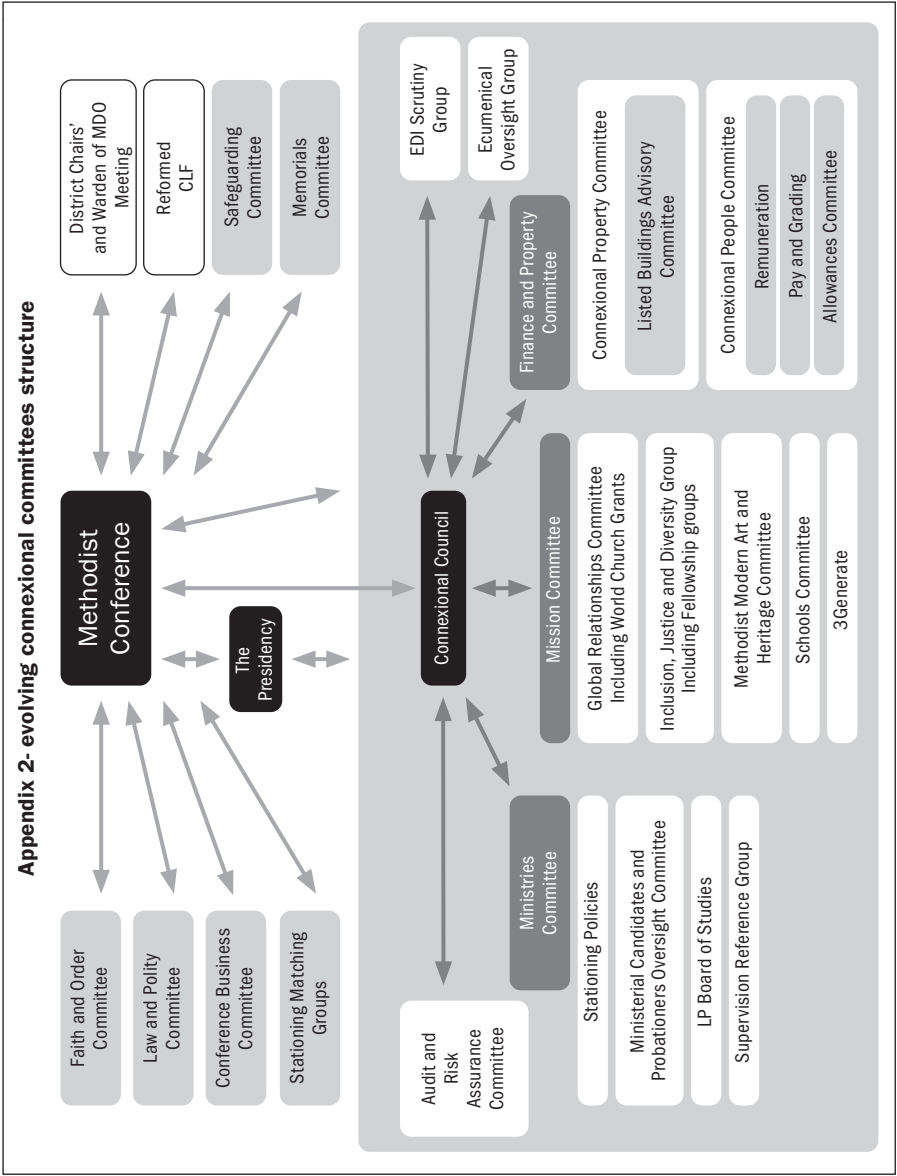
The situation with regard to non-separated Chairs has remained the same for some decades now. But it has become clear the demands, especially those connexionally and regionally, have markedly increased their workload. We celebrate our increasing partnership with neighbouring Districts, including in matters of safeguarding, complaints and discipline, candidates and probationers and regionally with the Learning Network. We recognise that these, and other connexional commitments, take them out of the District

far more often than a decade ago. At present, the second superintendents allowance paid to non-separated Chairs is paid by central funds, but the entirety of the rest of the stipend is paid by the Circuit the minister is resident in. Expenses are paid in the same way as any other District.

The Synod therefore asks the Conference to consider contributing to the stipend from central funds. This could be funded 50/50, half connexional funds and half from the Circuit. We believe that this would further re-enforce the Chair being a connexional person whilst also recognising locally that this is a shared appointment.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M10.



Appendix 3

MC/21/38

Review of the Size of the Conference

INTRODUCTION

1. When the Conference of the reunited Methodist Church first met in 1933 it had 900 members. Since then, the Conference has periodically reconsidered its membership in terms of overall size and of how the available seats should be filled. In 2007, the Conference adopted Standing Order 100(2), which requires that “the Conference shall from time to time, and not less than once in every five years” review the size of the membership of the Conference.
2. The 2020 Conference, by resolution 25/3, directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene such a review, to report to the 2021 Conference. The working party was appointed by the Methodist Council in October 2020 (MC/20/102, resolution 102/2), requiring the working party to report to the Council in March 2021.
3. The Conference last voted to change its size in 2007, when it decided to reduce the number of full voting members from 384 to 306 by 2010. In 2013, a further review was conducted, which concluded that it was too soon to make any further change to the size of the Conference, with which the Conference concurred. No further review has reported to the Conference since 2013, and so the current review is overdue.
4. The Working Party has met online on three occasions and has reviewed previous reports regarding the purpose, nature and size of the Conference. It has considered matters of leadership, representation and participation, issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, and the current work on Oversight and Trusteeship within the Methodist Church. The review of previous reports has helped the working party to identify principles that need to be considered when making decisions about the size of the Conference and these principles are laid out below.

PRINCIPLES & CONSIDERATIONS

The Purpose of the Conference

5. The Conference of 2006 adopted the statement of the purpose of the Conference set out in Annex A to this paper. That statement includes its own summary:

The primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian Conferring in

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order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will.

The current constitution of the Conference

6. The current number of full voting members (306) of the Conference is determined in SO 100; Clause 14 of the Deed of Union specifies that at least half of the 306 must be lay persons and SO 100 specifies that at least 14 of the 306 must be Deacons (including the Warden). The composition of the Conference is further specified as follows:
 - 1) ex-officio members specifically named in clause 14 of the Deed of Union (the three-year Presidency, the Secretary, the Chairs of District, the Warden of the MDO, the President and Secretary of the Irish Conference, two other persons appointed by each of the Irish Conference and the General Conference of the UMC, and two persons chosen from among the associate members appointed by other Churches);
 - 2) Conference-elected representatives (the number of them is set in SO 101 as nine);
 - 3) representatives of a Methodist Youth Assembly (under SOs 102 and 250 these are currently the Youth President and three others by elected by the Assembly)
 - 4) ex-officio members specified in SO 101 (the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, the Record Secretary, the Journal Secretary, the Convener of the Memorials Committee, and the Chair of the Business Committee);
 - 5) ex-officio members specified in SO 102 (the Chairs of the Methodist Council and the SRC, the lead Connexional Treasurer, the Connexional Secretaries (currently one), a commissioned forces chaplain, two persons serving overseas, six persons representing EDI interests and one representative of the Faith and Order Committee, of the Law and Polity Committee, of the Stationing Committee and of Methodist Women in Britain respectively);
 - 6) persons elected by the Synods (making up the remainder of the 306) – currently around 224 (73%).

Alteration to the list above or abolition of the categories of Conference-elected or Youth Assembly representatives would require amendments to the Deed of Union and would be subject to the deferred special resolution process taking two years (three Conferences).

7. SO 105 further specifies that District seats are to be allocated in proportion to the membership in each District except that:

- each District in England and Wales is entitled to a minimum of four representatives;
- two island Districts (Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) are each entitled to two representatives; and
- Scotland and Shetland share an allocation of six representatives.

At present, three Districts (Cymru, Bolton and Rochdale, and Cumbria) have only the minimum of four elected members whilst the largest District (London) elects twenty representatives.

8. In addition to the full members, there are currently six ecumenical associate members and eighteen associate members representing partner churches overseas.

Considerations relating to the size of the Conference

9. It seems clear that the size of the Conference should be sufficient to fulfil its responsibilities as a place of conferring, of oversight and as a governing body. How representative does the Conference need to be to exercise its role of 'adopting formal policies and legislation' (paragraph 4 of Annex A)? For example, would it be sufficient for the elected members of the Conference to be one presbyter and one lay person from each District (plus an appropriate number of deacons)? If so, the present requirements of the Deed of Union would require membership of the Conference to be somewhere between 160 and 180. Given the policies of the church on equality, diversity and inclusion and the need for the Districts to be, and to feel to be, properly represented the question remains as to what an appropriate number of representatives might be.
10. Currently ex officio members hold 27% of the seats in the Conference. Because more ex-officio seats are held by presbyters than by lay people, and because the Chairs of District must be presbyters, just over 60% of the presbyters in the Conference are elected by the District Synods whereas over 80% of both deacons and lay members are Synod-elected. If there is a wish to reduce the size of the Conference, there is a significant challenge around managing the balances between ministers and lay people and between ex-officio and elected members. It seems clear that the smaller the Conference becomes, the more difficult it is to ensure that the Districts make up a reasonable part of the voting membership of the Conference.
11. What number below the present membership of 306 is the 'right' size of Conference, and what should be the criteria for making that decision? To what degree would the Conference be less representative if the largest Districts had only the same number of representatives as the smallest? It is believed that the original intention at Methodist Union in 1932 was that there should be around one member of the

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Conference for 1000 members of the Church (although this has rarely been achieved in practice). That approach would give a Conference of around 170 members at present. On that model most Districts could probably have three (one presbyter and two lay) elected representatives (plus the Chair) with perhaps ten seats at most being distributed on the basis of membership in the Districts.

12. Ensuring that the Conference appropriately reflects the Church's policies on equality, diversity and inclusion is another challenge. Standing Order 417(2) requires members of District Synods, when electing representatives to the Conference, to 'have regard for the composition of the membership of the District as a whole with regard to age, sex and ethnic origin.' In most Districts this SO is read or printed, but unless the list of those standing for election is genuinely diverse, it may have little practical impact. Further steps are needed to enable Districts to ensure that the representatives they elect are diverse. The inclusion of representatives of the Youth Assembly (3Generate) and of people representing equality, diversity and inclusion interests helps, but diversity amongst District elected representatives is, from observation, somewhat patchy. The smaller the Conference becomes, and consequently the smaller the number elected by each Synod, the more challenging it will be for Districts to achieve the objective set in SO 417(2).
13. It should be noted that the discussion above does not cover associate (non-voting) members of the Conference. There are currently six ecumenical associate members and the working party sees no reason to change that at present. There are also eighteen non-voting representatives of partner Churches in other countries. In 2019 the Conference decided not to change the nature, nor number of representatives from the Global Church. A conversation about this was held with the Revd Conrad Hicks, Director of Global Relationships. The Global Relationships Committee is at present setting up an in-depth review with global partners regarding the nature of our relationship with them and this Working Party believes it would be better for any recommendation of a change to the number of representatives to be made following that process and taking into consideration the outcomes of the Oversight and Trusteeship review. Consequently, we make no recommendation for change in the numbers of associate members.
14. The working party was not explicitly asked to consider the financial implications of the size of the Conference, but we are aware that this is of interest and concern not just to members of the Conference but to the Church membership as a whole. Any reduction in the number of members of the Conference will, of course, lead to a reduction in the overall cost of the annual meeting of the Conference, through the direct costs of accommodation, food, travel and paperwork for each member. However, we also note that the smaller the Conference membership becomes, the larger the fixed costs of the venue and support costs become as a proportion

of total costs, while the cost of Conference members would become a relatively smaller proportion. If the same venue were to be used for the celebration events of the Conference weekend and for the business sessions of the Conference, then it is unlikely the Conference will be able to move to smaller venues, although it is possible that the use of different venues for weekdays and the weekend could be explored. A reduction in the length of the Conference by a day could lead to a similar or larger reduction in the cost of the Conference compared to a large reduction in the size of its membership.

Oversight and Trusteeship

15. Having noted the considerations above, the working party is aware that this work is being conducted alongside the ongoing work on *Oversight and Trusteeship* (Conference 2020, report 25). We are grateful to have been given sight of paper MC/21/7A to the January meeting of the Council which has enabled us to consider the relationship between the two processes. The key proposals in *Oversight and Trusteeship* are that a new Executive Council (EC) would replace the current Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee, and that there would be a reconfiguration of responsibilities, with some tasks currently conducted by the Conference in future being managed by the EC.
16. The proposed changes could mean a change in both the volume and the nature of the work that the Conference would be conducting in future. These changes will have implications for the appropriate size and constitution of the Conference. However, at the current time, the *Oversight and Trusteeship* proposals have not reached the level of detail where it is clear exactly which tasks and responsibilities would be conducted by the Conference and which by the EC or its subcommittees in future. Therefore, it is too early to draw firm conclusions, but we can offer suggestions as to a range of possible effects upon the Conference that need to be considered.
17. If a significant number of tasks were to be transferred from the Conference's workload to that of the EC, the Conference might have a smaller workload. It might require less time to conduct its business, and it may also be argued that it also would need fewer members to conduct this business. Alternatively, it could be argued that, while less time might be needed, the same range and number of members would be needed to allow for proper debate. It may also be the case that many of the matters that might move from being the responsibility of the Conference to the EC are those matters currently dealt with very briefly as essentially a rubber-stamp, including in *en bloc* business, and so the reallocation may in fact not make a significant difference to the Conference's workload.

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18. Another view could be that with some of the more administrative matters transferred to the EC, the Conference would have more time, energy and focus to devote to conferring on matters of principle, and to setting the vision which the EC would then seek to implement. This may require, or benefit from, longer and deeper consideration of the issues which come before the Conference. This may require as much time as present, and at least as wide a variety of perspectives. Indeed, the working party is minded to suggest that more effort should be made to shape the processes of conferring in the Conference so that a larger number and wider range of members of the Conference are able to contribute to debates.
19. The size and composition of the EC is another consideration relevant to the size and composition of the Conference. The EC would be a smaller body than the Methodist Council, and not be representative of the Districts in the way that the Council currently is. As the representation of Districts (as well as of the Youth Assembly and EDI concerns) would be removed at the level of the Council, there is an argument that such representation would need to be maintained (or increased) through the Conference. As the EC would be accountable to the Conference, the Conference would need to retain the capacity to hold it to account, which would require sufficient expertise and time to keep up with the work done by the EC.
20. There is also a question regarding the nature of the work the EC and its subcommittees could undertake, compared to the current Council. It is argued that a smaller core group, meeting more frequently will allow more efficient decision-making. This might enable the EC to conduct a high volume of administrative and management work swiftly and effectively. However, the Council currently also has a consultative role in discussing significant pieces of work, particularly before they are considered by the Conference. This is made possible by its representative nature. Without the Council, there could be a need for additional processes to be used to ensure such scrutiny of work by representative groups. This could, for example, be taken on by subgroups of the Conference, perhaps working remotely during the year as suggested in paragraph 26 below.
21. There is also uncertainty at present about the authority that the EC would have to make decisions during the year, where this goes beyond its core role of implementing the decisions of the Conference. Currently, where an urgent decision is needed before the next Conference, in most cases the Council is empowered to take this on the delegated authority of the Conference. The confidence of the Conference in the Council to take such decisions derives in part from its size and its representative nature. It is not clear whether it would be appropriate for the EC to take all such decisions on the Conference's behalf between annual Conferences. It may be appropriate for the Conference to convene (remotely) for one or more brief meetings during the year to provide guidance on matters of principle and to give direction to the EC.

22. The January report of the *Oversight and Trusteeship* process proposed (MC/21/7A, 8.2 j) that all members of the EC should be members of the Conference. This would lead to an increase in the ex-officio members of Conference of between nine and sixteen, after taking into account the current roles that would be replaced by the new system. It might be possible to make reductions in some other categories of current ex-officio members, but it would be very challenging to end up with a total number of ex-officio members lower than the current total, without significant changes to the principles of which roles require ex-officio seats. In turn, if the total size of the Conference were also to be reduced, this would lead to District representatives making up a smaller proportion, and ex-officio members a larger proportion compared to the current composition.
23. We suggest that the question of whether all members of the EC should automatically be members of the Conference needs careful consideration. A case can clearly be made that it would be appropriate for all trustees to have a role in the Conference. However, this block would make up a significant proportion of the members of Conference, and will require reductions in the number of District-elected representatives to accommodate it. There is also arguably a tension between the role of the EC being to receive and implement instructions sent by the Conference, and all its members also being members of the Conference and involved in shaping those decisions.
24. In summary, the evolving proposals of the *Oversight and Trusteeship* process raise significant questions of the future role and ways of working of the Conference. We welcome and encourage debate on these questions alongside discussion of the EC and other new bodies that are proposed. We think that it is neither possible nor wise to make decisions on the size and composition of the Conference until the Conference has expressed its mind on the *Oversight and Trusteeship* proposals, and until the future role and responsibilities of the Conference in any new system is clearer. This does not necessarily mean that the size of the Conference cannot be reconsidered until the *Oversight and Trusteeship* process is completed, as this may take several years, and the proposals themselves, if accepted, would at the least require some changes to the ex-officio membership of the Conference. However, it would mean waiting until the Conference has taken major decisions of principle, such as whether an EC will be created, and the types of matters which would in future be considered by the Conference.

Possible future ways of working

25. The Working Party believes that being a member of the Conference might be recognised as a year-round responsibility, whereby members of the Conference may be called upon to confer about or scrutinise work between Conferences – either as

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a whole body, or in sub-groups. This would allow a level of scrutiny and consultation by a representative group which may be lost without the Methodist Council. When registering as representatives, members might express areas of interest in the life of the Church in which they would wish to make a contribution and be allocated to sub-groups using that information. Using technology such as Zoom would allow for broad participation. Because there would be no travelling these events could be done at a suitable time to allow as many as possible to attend and spread over several weeks to allow each to have a focus, rather than feel like one was rushing from one subject to another.

CONCLUSIONS

26. It may be that the Council will conclude that this report is sufficient and that no further action is needed on the size of Conference until the next five-yearly review is due. By that time the outcome of the current work on oversight and trusteeship should be clearer. If the Council judges that no further work needs to be done until the next five year review, it might simply decline resolution 3. But, if the Council wishes further work to be done on this issue before then - whether through the Oversight and Trusteeship Working Party or by future specific group, resolution 3 is one possible way forward.
27. Noting that changes in the Deed of Union take longer to achieve, when further work is to be done, the working party recommends that the issues raised in Annex B to this report should be considered, preferably by the Council as guidance to those undertaking such further work.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 38/1. The Council received the report.**
- 38/2. The Council agreed to recommend that, in the light of the work currently being done on Oversight and Trusteeship, a change to the size of the Conference will be made when the implications of that wider work for the role of the Conference are clearer.**
- 38/3. The Council agreed to recommend that those working on Oversight and Trusteeship should bear in mind both the principles described in this report and the ideas as to how Conference members might, in the future, most effectively participate in the governance of the Church and the furtherance of its mission.**
- 38/4. The Council agreed to recommend that the issues raised in Annex B to this report should be taken into account at an early stage of any further work**

on the size of the Conference, either by those working on Oversight and Trusteeship, or by a future working group convened for that purpose.

ANNEX A

The Purpose of the Methodist Conference (as adopted by the Conference of 2006)

1. Methodism began as a movement of people connected with John Wesley (“the Connexion”) which was structured for mission and discipleship, and which eventually became a Church. The origins of the Methodist Conference lie in a series of meetings which John Wesley held with his Preachers, Helpers and Assistants as the movement developed. In these meetings they sought to discern the movements of the Spirit and the promptings of grace, and to shape and regulate ways of responding to them in worship and mission. The means of doing this was through a process of “Christian Conferring” which Wesley also saw operating when people gathered together in a Class Meeting or Band to help each other in their Christian experience and to support each other in their discipleship; and when the Travelling Preachers visited and met with the Class Leaders to oversee and support them in their task. In the Class Meeting and Band the basic questions for this Christian Conferring can be expressed in modern terms as “Where is God in our experience? What is God doing? What is God calling or prompting us to do?”. In the first Conference which Wesley held with the Preachers in 1744 this type of question was applied to the task of the Preachers and so took the form “What to teach? How to teach? What to do?”, or, in other words, the content, methodology and strategic organisation of mission.
2. As a result, the Conference primarily exists to exercise *oversight* in the broadest sense of the term. It seeks to focus, renew and nurture the whole connexion’s worship of God and participation in God’s mission. In doing so it seeks to ensure that the whole Connexion remains true to its calling and to its experience and place in an apostolic succession of faithful response and witness to the Gospel. In this its teaching role is still of paramount importance, both in formulating what is to be taught and ensuring that it is shared with all the Methodist people. The Conference therefore stands at the heart of the Connexion, connecting it with its past and its future, linking it with external bodies and joining together its constituent parts.
3. As noted above, one way in which the Conference exercises that general oversight is in formulating and overseeing strategies for responding to God’s will throughout the whole Connexion. In doing this, the Conference is being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God. This is the role ascribed to it in such foundational documents as The Deed of Union (first adopted in 1932 and amended from time to time by subsequent Conferences) and The Methodist Church Act 1976, and involves

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responsibility for the “government, discipline, management and administration”¹⁶ of the Church’s affairs.

4. The Conference Review Group believes that this aspect of being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God is extremely important. Much of the activity of the Conference consists of the exercise of governance or formal authority. The Conference does this directly through adopting formal policies and legislation. It also does it indirectly by setting the parameters and structures of accountability and support for other bodies to exercise authority in its name in particular places or areas of work. Similarly with regard to management, the role of the Conference is to set a framework of clear policies and purposes, authorising and permitting others to exercise management directly, and seeking to ensure that they do so under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship. The direct exercise of management is the duty of those other individuals and groups. It is their responsibility to formulate specific and detailed strategies for enacting the Conference’s policies and fulfilling its purposes; for setting particular objectives concerning the implementation of those strategies; for deploying human, material and technological resources to achieve those objectives; and for monitoring and assessing the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the objectives.
5. Another way in which the Conference expresses oversight is in the collective exercise of leadership. This involves harvesting the insights of its members, inspiring them to be imaginative and empowering them to share their ideas and develop new vision. It then involves the Conference in providing a model for the rest of the Connexion of articulating vision, of initiating action and encouraging people to follow, and of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.
6. All of these aspects of oversight involve waiting on God. For this to happen there has to be space in the overall timetable for there to be times of spontaneous prayer, praise and contemplation as well as formal prayer and structured worship. But waiting on God also occurs through Christian Conferring. This involves people taking spiritual, theological and practical counsel together and engaging in processes of intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue that lead to collective decision-making. Some of this occurs informally through people meeting each other over meals and at fringe and other events around the sessions of the Conference. Much of it occurs in the formal business of the Conference itself as people seek to discern the will and activity of God through paying attention to each other’s insights and experience. The Conference should primarily be looking for the inspiration of the Spirit, and in the light of that to lift

16 Deed of Union Clause 18.

the spirits of its members and provide inspiration for the whole Connexion.

7. The Review Group therefore recommends that the Conference affirm that **the primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian Conferring in order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will.** This purpose should inform and influence everything that the Conference does.

ANNEX B

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION IN ANY FURTHER WORK

1. Would a smaller Conference make it much harder to achieve the diversity objective set in SO 417(2) and the Church's wider policies on equality, diversity and inclusion? How might the objectives of a diverse Conference be better achieved? Should an average age profile or demographic be set enabling a younger and/or more diverse set of views about the future of the Church to be expressed? And, if so, how might that be achieved in practice?
2. Should the present balance between *ex-officio* and District elected seats (currently 27% and 73%) be maintained if the size of Conference is further reduced? And if not, at what point would a reduction in District elected seats lead to the Conference becoming insufficiently representative of the wider church?
3. What, if any, changes should be made in the specific membership currently specified in the Deed of Union (the three-year Presidency, the Secretary, the Chairs of District, the Warden of the MDO, the President and Secretary of the Irish Conference, two other persons appointed by each of the Irish Conference and the General Conference of the UMC, and two persons chosen from among the associate members appointed by other Churches)?
4. Which, if any, other matters laid down in the Deed of Union (the existence of the categories of Conference-elected and Youth Assembly representatives and the requirement that half of the members of Conference must be lay) should be reconsidered?
5. Noting that the Oversight and Trusteeship proposals will affect some of this list, which, if any, changes in the numbers of *ex-officio* and other seats set in SOs should be considered (these are currently the number of Conference elected representatives, the number of Youth Assembly representatives, and the following office holders: the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, the Record Secretary, the Journal Secretary, the Convener of

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the Memorials Committee, and the Chair of the Business Committee, the Chairs of the Methodist Council and the SRC, the lead Connexional Treasurer, the Connexional Secretaries (currently one), a commissioned forces chaplain, two persons serving overseas, six persons representing EDI interests and one representative of the F&O Committee, of the L&P Committee, of the Stationing Committee and of Methodist Women in Britain respectively)?

6. Should the suggestions about involving members of Conference in conferring about or in scrutinising work between Conferences (paragraph 26 of this report) and other possible new ways of working be taken forward and, if so, by whom and on what timescale?