

## **District Leading Team**

**08 May 2024**

### **A Report from the Methodist Council April 2024**

*The final meeting of the Methodist Council was held at Woodland Grange in Leamington Spa from 13 – 15 April. I usually write personal reflections for DLT. But because there was a final report that was prepared by the Secretary of the Conference, I have chosen to submit that instead.*

*Thank you for allowing me to represent the Sheffield District on the Methodist Council for this last year. It was an immense privilege to do that.*

*Romeo*

## **Mission Committee**

The Council received the report of the Mission Committee. It included a report from the Global Relationships Committee on the breadth of ongoing work and an updated Memorandum of Understanding between the Methodist Church in Britain and Christian Aid. The Council approved the MoU, which reaffirms the longstanding relationship. The Council agreed a requirement for all districts to have a District Mission Plan and the amendments to the relevant Standing Order will go before the 2025 Conference. On behalf of the Methodist Church in Britain, the Council accepted the gift of a new work of art, *Preaching* by George Walsh, which is to be used for mission as a permanent part of the Methodist Modern Art Collection. The Council agreed to lift the moratorium on acquisitions to the touring works in the Methodist Modern Art Collection and its archive.

## **God for All**

The Director of Evangelism and Growth, Trey Hall, presented the God for All paper, which offered a strategic update and plans for 2025-2032. The paper included testimonies from churches who are living out the God for All work, including two churches that joined together to strengthen their mission which in turn had helped with sharing resources and a reduction in administration. The Council members voted to recommend the report to the Conference.

## **Reflections from the President and Vice-President**

During the Sunday morning worship, the President and Vice-President reflected on their year so far. The President of the Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, focused her reflection on the theme from the year of 'Hidden Treasures'. She explained to Council members how she had kept returning to Matthew chapter 2 in her year, and explored the links between the account of the Magi travelling to Jerusalem looking for hope and her travels round the Connexion finding hidden treasures. She told of the many people and churches she had met where people wanted to try something new and talked of the countless people she had met who were being generous with their time and treasures. She concluded by saying she would pray that we would continue to focus on the treasure and to seek out the glimmers of light.

In her reflections, the Vice-President, Deacon Kerry Scarlett, shared her year through the lens of an ordained deacon looking at prayer, witness and service. She observed that when things are grounded in prayerful discernment people find themselves back to focusing on people as treasure. She encouraged Council members to think of themselves as treasure, telling them that if we don't know we are treasure, how can we understand others? She asked what servant ministry meant for us and talked of the joy and challenge, and the need to keep challenging whether our service is what God is asking us to do.

## **Finance**

The Council heard from Matt Tattersall, Executive Director of Finance & Resources, how the unprecedented changes in the economy have improved the circumstances of the pension schemes. As a result, the Council agreed to recommend to the Conference that the donations made to the Pension Reserve Fund be returned to donors with interest. They also recommended to the Conference that: ministers' pensions be increased by an additional 5 percent (above what is already due) from September 2024; circuit contribution rates are reduced from 26.9 percent to 20 per cent, and that surplus funds in the Pension Reserve Fund are released to support connexional priorities.

He went on to present the Connexional Central Services Budget for 2024/25 highlighting how the proposals were a continuation of the plans that the Council and Conference had agreed in 2023. These include a real terms cut in the Methodist Church Fund assessment of 3 per cent.

The Council heard of the invaluable work of Connexional Fund Treasurers who work in many circuits to encourage donations to Connexional Funds. Proposals were agreed to reduce the bureaucracy of the associated processes and to draw attention to how the funds are used.

### **Stationing Review**

The Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Revd Michaela Youngson, and the chair of the Stationing Review Group, Dr Garry Young, presented an update on the Stationing Review work. After group work and feedback, an amended resolution was agreed which will give the group time to carry out further consultation. Their recommendations will be brought before the 2025 Conference.

### **Ministries Committee**

The Council received an update from the Ministries Committee which included recommendations for a new process of assessing probation and the setting up of a working group to look at Connexional Economic Justice. The Council directed that a wider consultation be undertaken concerning the implications of the proposals for assessing probation, with a report to be brought to the Connexional Council.

### **Justice, Dignity and Solidarity**

The Revd Charity Nzegwu, the co-chair of the JDS Committee, presented an update on the work. Council members heard that the Solidarity Circles have met several times and more members have been recruited. District EDI officers have been established with a number of awareness events being held. The Discrimination and Abuse Response Service has been developed in readiness for it going live across the whole Connexion. The Council received the report and a proposal to replace the two co-chairs with a Chair and Deputy Chair was carried.

### **Minutes of the Conference and Directory**

The Council was asked to recommend the revised Standing Order, which gives effect to the Conference's decision to publish the Minutes of the Annual Conference and the Directory in two separate volumes. They heard that this is in order to ensure the Methodist Church in Britain complies with data protection law, whilst also enabling the decisions of the Conference to be shared as appropriate. The Council received the report and voted to recommend it to the Conference.

## **Policy for Electing the President and Vice-President of the Conference**

The Secretary of the Conference, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, presented a paper which proposed a new process to elect the President and Vice-President of the Conference. Council members were told it aims to ensure that safer recruitment policy is followed and will make the system more robust ensuring that a discernment conversation takes place. The Council received the report which will now be presented to the Conference.

## **Action for Hope**

The Council heard an update on the progress made by Action for Hope in moving towards the goal of net zero in 2030. The Council was informed that there are now over 900 Methodist Churches registered with Eco Church, as well as some Scottish congregations registered with Eco Congregation Scotland. This represents 25 per cent of all churches within the Methodist Church in Britain, with the aim that 50 per cent will be registered by 2026. The Council received the report.

## **Part 11 Review**

The Council received an update from Mr Dave Orford on the Part 11 review into the Complaints and Discipline process. Members heard about several recommendations including alternative resolution approaches where reconciliation might not be appropriate and the Church adopting a three tier model for addressing complaints. The Council received the report and commended it to the Conference. The Chair of the Council thanked Mr Orford and the team for their hard work.

## **Independence in Safeguarding**

The Council received a report from the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee, Ms Judith Davey-Cole. It agreed its approach to independence in safeguarding and therefore proposed to the Conference a restructuring of the Safeguarding Committee.

## **Additional Business**

Council members agreed to send a letter of congratulation to the Rt Revd Anne Hollinghurst who has been appointed the next principal of The Queen's Foundation.

## **Closing Thoughts**

In closing worship, the Revd Sonia Hicks asked members to take what they had seen and heard and share it with the wider Connexion and encouraged them to continue to be living stones wherever they find themselves. Dr Hustler thanked Mrs Hicks for her work as Chair and for the way she had led proceedings.