

## **METHODIST COUNCIL REPORT OCTOBER 2023 - April 2024**

### **Update Report to the Representative Synod– 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

The methodist Council Members met twice online and once in person at Woodland Grange Conference Centre, Leamington Spa for their last and final Meeting.

Over the Connexional year, we looked at over 80 Reports detailing how the Council keeps the life of the Methodist Church in Britain under review, and proposing to the Conference changes which will make the Church's life, work, mission, and worship more effective in responding to God's love and sharing the Good News, were extensively considered, and received. Through plenary sessions and smaller groupings, the Council engaged in discussions that resulted in decisions being made or in some cases simply providing updates on progress of on-going work (e.g. safeguarding, candidates health policy, district mergers as well as the overall workplan from the conference). These reports can be found on the Methodist Church website should one require additional information.

Here below are some the main elements of our discussions in areas that I feel are relevant for our District, Circuits and Churches:

#### **1. GOD FOR ALL UPDATE**

This church wide strategy for evangelism and growth (2025 – 2032) has been refreshed to elucidate the intended direction of travel and offer further clarification on the ways in which the strategy is shaping the life, understanding, mission, and witness of the methodist church and its people, especially in the areas of evangelism, pioneering and planting discipleship and missional growth and leadership. The Council overwhelmingly voted in favour of the report being presented to the 2024 Conference.

#### **2. ACTION FOR HOPE UPDATE**

Good progress is being made towards our goal of net Zero by 2030. There is, however, a recognition that this is a challenging target impacted by several other external factors some of which are beyond our control. To date 900 Methodist Churches have 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. Council also approved the allocation of £3M of grants from the Connexional Priority Fund for making existing activities more sustainable and for making carbon reduction adaptations to existing assets. That said, the key take home message is that climate concerns are inherently missional and are a part of our discipleship hence it will take all of us to achieve the goal.

#### **3. STATIONING REVIEW REPORT**

This report outlined a thorough and wide-ranging review of the stationing processes, considering the changing nature of ministry, the financial and environmental costs of our current way of working and the need for the JDS strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working. 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.

#### **4. JUSTICE, DIGNITY & SOLIDARITY (JDS) UPDATE**

A number of awareness events are being held throughout the Connexion, a User Guide and an Inclusive Language Guide to help engage with the strategy have been published and both have been well received across the connexion. Additionally, those in Worship leadership roles are now required to undertake the mandatory EDI training and as far as possible, and with consideration of personal preference, gendered titles which disclose the marital status of a woman should be avoided in all connexional meetings and correspondence.

Adoption of the Chair and deputy Chair leadership model has been assented to; as it provides a clear line of authority, accountability and streamlined decision making, thus a change to SO 336 to allow the JDS committee to effect this change will be recommended to the 2024 Conference. As we develop our mission and ministry together, let this strategy aimed at helping us work towards an inclusive Church be the work of the whole church and not just the JDS Committee.

#### **5. INDEPENDENCE IN SAFEGUARDING IN FAITH COMMUNITIES**

The safeguarding committee has done some work on independence in safeguarding to help identify actions that we should take as a church to help us improve; by exploring good governance of safeguarding and its fundamental pillars of independence, transparency, and accountability. The Council agreed to this the approach to independence as outlined in the report and supported that the restructuring of the safeguarding committee be commended to the 2024 Conference.

#### **6. INVESTORS IN PEOPLE AWARD**

The Connexional Team has been presented with the Investors in People (IIP) silver level accreditation award on 1<sup>st</sup> attempt. The Council members wholeheartedly congratulated the team on their fantastic achievement.

#### **7. PART 11 REVIEW UPDATE**

A series of recommendations that will improve the Church's complaints and discipline process in several areas including communications, record keeping, alternative resolution approaches where reconciliation might not be appropriate and the Church adopting a three-tier model for addressing complaints have been proposed and will be commended to the Conference of 2024.

#### **8. DISTRICT MERGERS AND AMALGAMATIONS UPDATE**

The challenges of resources of time, people, and finances continue to persist making the case for amalgamations well-founded and urgent for some districts if their churches and circuits are to increasingly thrive in their mission and worship. For those reasons, proposals to form single districts will be submitted to the 2024 Conference to amalgamate the Birmingham District and the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District in 2025 and also to amalgamate the Manchester and Stockport District to form part of the new Northwest England District, which comes into being on 1 September 2024. Merger consultations are at an advanced stage with the Circuits and Synods of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Districts and for Plymouth and Exeter Districts.

#### **9. MINUTES OF THE CONFERENCE AND DIRECTORY UPDATE**

To be GDPR compliant, Conference reached a decision that the Minutes of Conference and the Directory ought to be published in two separate volumes; one containing those items which constitute the Minutes for a wider yet targeted readership and the other which would be the Directory, containing the address lists and restricted to ministers. As a consequence, the Council revised SO124 which will be commended to the 2024 Conference to allow this change to be effected.

#### **10. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The Methodist Council ceases to exist in August 2024, and it will be replaced by the Connexional Council which will come into being in September 2024. The Chair of the Council, the Rev'd Sonia Hicks in closing worship asked the members to take away what they had heard and seen during their tenure and to continue to be living stones wherever they find themselves. The Chair also thanked Council members for their service.

**Thank you for your prayers and support over the years!**