

4. CHANGES TO THE MANUAL OF LAWS

The following is the 'legislation' which was incorporated into the Manual of Laws by Conference 2005 in order to give effect to the changes in Society and Circuit structures arising from the ConneXions process:-

CHAPTER 10 CIRCUIT ORGANISATION

(amended 2005)

10.01 *The official meetings of a Circuit shall be:*

- *The Congregational Meeting,*
- *The Church Council,*
- *The Circuit Meeting,*
- *The Circuit Executive,*
- *The Trustees' Meeting, where appropriate.*

The Congregational Meeting

10.02 *At least once each year, the Church Council shall arrange a Congregational Meeting for fellowship and inspiration.*

10.03 *The Congregational Meeting shall:*

- (a) *Review the previous twelve months and celebrate advances made,*
- (b) *Set out goals for the next twelve months,*
- (c) *Discuss the vision of the Church for the ensuing five years,*
- (d) *Ratify the appointment of Church Officials upon the nomination of the Minister,*
- (e) *Elect members of the Church Council upon the nomination of the Minister, as required,*
- (f) *Through the Secretary convey to the Church Council for its consideration concerns expressed or recommendations made.*

The Church Council

10.04 *The aim of every congregation is to glorify God through its worship and its witness within its community. Methodist congregations achieve this with the encouragement of, and by commitment to, the Methodist Church in Ireland.*

10.05 *To ensure that this aim is achieved, every Society shall be governed by a Church Council. (A Church Council may govern more than one Society.) The Council shall:*

- (a) *Produce a succinct Mission Statement to encapsulate the direction the Church wishes to take,*
- (b) *Review this Mission Statement from time to time,*
- (c) *Annually set achievable goals for the fulfilment of the Church's mission within the terms of the Mission Statement,*
- (d) *Establish Working Groups, with clear guidelines and sufficient authority to achieve the specific goals assigned to them,*
- (e) *Assist the members of the congregation in using their gifts and experience to serve the kingdom of God,*
- (f) *Annually guide the congregation in celebrating the advances of the previous twelve months and in identifying the next steps in the fulfilment of its mission,*
- (g) *Consider and promote the spiritual life of the Society,*
- (h) *Promote and extend the mission of the Society in the local community,*
- (i) *Encourage Council Members, through mutual consultation and prayer, to discharge their duties more effectively.*

- 10.06** *The Church Council shall be responsible for the oversight of the work of God in the Society, including:*
- (a) Arrangements for worship,*
 - (b) Pastoral care, nurturing and discipling of the congregation,*
 - (c) Identification of training needs and the implementation of training within the Society,*
 - (d) Reception, discipline and exclusion of members as required by the laws of the Church (Ch 5),*
 - (e) Work with children and young people,*
 - (f) The role of the Society within the Circuit and the Connexion, including Connexional activities, publications and funds,*
 - (g) Evangelism and witness of the society in the local community, including cooperation with other churches,*
 - (h) Arranging at least one Congregational Meeting each year, which shall be announced on the four Sundays prior to the meeting*
 - (i) The finance of the Society,*
 - (j) Maintenance, letting and insurance of all property entrusted to the Society, subject to such rights and obligations, if any, as may be vested in Local Trustees,*
 - (k) Communication with the congregation relating to the work of the Council.*
- 10.07** *The Council shall meet at least four times each year. No meeting of the Council shall be convened without the prior approval of the Minister.*
- 10.08** *The quorum required for a meeting of the Church Council shall be one-third of the total membership of the Council.*
- 10.09** *The Council may appoint individual members of the Council or working parties, which need not be exclusively composed of members of the Council, to undertake specific tasks relating to the responsibilities of the Council.*
- (a) The Council shall appoint at least one of its members to each working party.*
 - (b) Each individual or working party shall be given specific terms of reference and shall report to the Council.*
 - (c) The Council shall designate one of its members on each working party to report on its behalf to the Council.*
 - (d) Reports from individuals or working parties should be submitted in writing in advance of Council meetings.*
 - (e) A working party may, if circumstances warrant, be given powers to act on behalf of the Council and the Society within clearly specified parameters.*
- 10.10** *In Societies with worshipping congregations of up to about thirty people the congregation itself may be the Church Council, subject to the provisions of para 10.24, below.*
- 10.11** *The term 'Church Council' shall henceforth be deemed to include the term 'Leaders' Meeting' where appropriate throughout the Manual of Laws.*

Constitution of the Church Council

- 10.12** *The Council shall be constituted as follows:*
- (a) The **Minister** responsible for the Society, who shall preside at meetings of the Council, or delegate the responsibility of presiding to another minister or member of the Council,*
 - (b) **Other ministers and probationers** in the active work assigned to the work of the Society,*
 - (c) The **Church Officials** (as listed in para 10.22),*
 - (d) The **elected members** (as described in para 10.17-10.21).*
- 10.13** *Persons appointed by the Circuit who have a pastoral responsibility in the Society(ies) may be invited to give reports from time to time.*
- 10.14** *The Circuit Superintendent shall be ex-officio a member of the Council.*
- 10.15** *In the interests of continuity the retiring Society Steward shall be an ex-officio member of the Council for one year following his/her retirement from that office.*
- 10.16** *Only Members of the Methodist Church in Ireland are eligible to be members of the Church Council.*

Elected Members

- 10.17** *The number of elected members of the Church Council shall be a multiple of three not exceeding 18 as determined by the Council from time to time, bearing in mind the need adequately to reflect the nature of the congregation, while also seeking the smallest number consistent with the efficient oversight of the affairs of the Society.*
- 10.18** *One-third of the elected members of the Council shall retire each year and normally shall not be eligible for re-election for at least one year.*
- 10.19** *Each year in the autumn the Council shall appoint three of its members to constitute the Advisory Group to consult with the Minister on nominations and appointments for the ensuing year.*
- 10.20** *The Minister shall, after consultation with the Advisory Group, nominate suitable Church Members to be listed on the ballot paper for election to the Council by the Congregational Meeting.*
- 10.21** *In the event of a casual vacancy on the Council, the Council shall co-opt a Member of the Society to fill the vacancy until the next appropriate Congregational Meeting. Church Officials*
- 10.22** *A Society shall have the following Church Officials, who shall normally hold office for three years:*
- (a) The **Society Steward**, who shall be regarded as the official lay representative of the Society and shall support and encourage the Minister(s) and congregation in the development of the Work of God. When necessary, the Society Steward may also serve as Secretary, but not as Treasurer or Property Steward.*
 - (b) The **Treasurer**, who shall be responsible to the Council for all financial income of the Society, for its proper use or transmission as appropriate and for the prompt payment of all accounts. He/she shall keep accurate accounts and submit them for annual audit, according to the requirements of Conference.*
 - (c) The **Property Steward**, who shall be responsible to the Council for the proper maintenance of all property.*
 - (d) The **Secretary**, who shall in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Council prepare the Agenda for meetings and issue notices in writing in good time and shall record the proceedings in a Minute Book for that purpose. He/she shall also act as Secretary to the Congregational Meeting.*
- 10.23** *A **Society Steward-Designate** may be nominated one year in advance of a vacancy in that office and may attend Church Council meetings during the year but will not be eligible to vote.*

Special Provisions for Small Societies

- 10.24** *In Societies with worshipping congregations of up to about thirty people, the congregation itself may be the Church Council.*
- (a) Such a congregational Church Council shall be subject to all provisions relating to Church Councils except as indicated below.*
 - (b) Notice of congregational Council meetings shall normally be given at least one week in advance and may be by pulpit announcement.*
 - (c) Congregational Council meetings may be held following Sunday worship, and all decisions must be minuted and the minutes confirmed and signed.*
 - (d) The quorum required for a meeting of a congregational Church Council shall be all those present at a meeting for which proper notice has been given, provided at least four adults from the Society are present.*
 - (e) The Council shall appoint three of its members to advise the Minister on the nomination of Church Officials.*
 - (f) Church Officials may, where necessary, be Members of other Societies.*
 - (g) The Council shall ratify the appointment of Church Officials upon the nomination of the Minister.*
 - (h) The Church Officials (in consultation with the Minister), or the Council itself, may designate persons in the congregation to undertake specific tasks.*
 - (i) The Church Officials, in consultation with the Minister, shall ensure that the congregational Church Council adopts and updates a Mission Statement, sets annual achievable goals, and discharges all responsibilities laid upon the Church Council.*

The Circuit Meeting

- 10.25** *In a Circuit there shall be a Circuit Meeting for the purpose of :*
- (a) Providing mutual support and fellowship;*
 - (b) Electing Circuit Officials, upon nomination by the Superintendent Minister assisted by Circuit Executive;*
 - (c) Sharing stories of the work of God, thereby enabling Societies to learn from each other;*
 - (d) Passing on information to Societies from the Circuit, District or Connexion.*
- 10.26** *The Circuit Meeting shall consist of :*
- (a) Members of the Church Councils and the Working Parties thereof,*
 - (b) Members of the Circuit Executive,*
 - (c) Fully accredited local preachers in the active work,*
 - (d) Class Leaders or their equivalent,*
 - (e) Lay persons employed by the Circuit or its constituents in a pastoral capacity,*
 - (f) Members of the Circuit who are local trustees or who hold District or Connexional office or are members of District or Connexional committees, and*
 - (g) Ministers on the Circuit, including retired ministers and those without pastoral charge.*
- 10.27** *The Superintendent Minister is responsible for ensuring that the Circuit Meeting is properly chaired.*
- 10.28** *The Circuit Secretary shall act as secretary of the Circuit Meeting.*
- 10.29** *The Circuit Meeting shall be held at least once a year, early in the Connexional year.*

The Circuit Executive

- 10.30** *In each Circuit there shall be a Circuit Executive for the purpose of deliberation and decision-making in relation to matters of Circuit responsibility.*
- 10.31** *The Circuit Executive shall have responsibility in relation to the following:*
- (a) Co-ordination of the work of the Societies, with an emphasis on strategy and vision for the area;*
 - (b) Ministerial and remunerated lay appointments in the Circuit;*
 - (c) Candidates for the ministry, upon nomination by the Superintendent;*
 - (d) Election of Circuit representatives to District Synod and to Conference;*
 - (e) Purchase and up-keep of manses on the Circuit;*
 - (f) Trustees' business, where appropriate;*
 - (g) Local Preachers' business, where appropriate;*
 - (h) Annual financial audit of Circuit and society accounts;*
 - (i) Management of Circuit accounts and oversight of society accounts;*
 - (j) Applications from Societies for Connexional approval or for grants from Connexional bodies;*
 - (k) Arrangement of Circuit Meetings;*
 - (l) Assisting the Superintendent Minister in the nomination of Circuit Officials for election by the Circuit Meeting.*
 - (m) Links with other churches.*
- 10.32** *The Circuit Executive will meet as necessary, at times and places determined by the Superintendent Minister, and as a minimum at least once each quarter.*
- 10.33** *The quorum required for a meeting of the Circuit Executive shall be one-third of all members.*
- 10.34** *The Circuit Secretary shall ensure that the proceedings of the Circuit Executive are duly recorded, and in consultation with the Superintendent Minister, summon the meeting and prepare the agenda.*
- 10.35** *The Circuit Executive shall be chaired by the Superintendent Minister or by another member of the Circuit Executive designated by the Superintendent Minister.*

- 10.36** *Within these parameters, the Circuit Executive may establish its own procedures and structure for itself and the Circuit.*

Constitution of the Circuit Executive

- 10.37** *The Circuit Executive shall consist of :*
- (a) Ministers in the active work appointed to work on the various Societies of the Circuit;*
 - (b) Circuit Officials, as listed in para 10.39, below;*
 - (c) The Society Steward of each society;*
 - (d) One other representative of each Society designated by its Church Council.*
 - (e) Each trust shall have the right to have one representative at a meeting of the Circuit Executive at which matters relating to that particular trust property are on the agenda.*
 - (f) The Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting shall have the right to have one representative at a meeting of the Circuit Executive at which matters relating to Local Preachers are on the agenda.*

Single Society Circuits

- 10.38** *Where a Circuit consists of a single Society, the Congregational Meeting may undertake the responsibilities of the Circuit Meeting and the Church Council the responsibilities of the Circuit Executive, in which case the Circuit Officials shall be ex-officio members of the Church Council.*

Circuit Officials

- 10.39** *A Circuit shall have the following Officials, who shall normally hold office for three years:*
- (a) **Circuit Steward**, who shall provide spiritual, pastoral and advisory support to the Superintendent Minister and shall be regarded as the official lay representative of the Circuit at civic and other appropriate occasions.*
 - (b) **Circuit Treasurer**.*
 - (c) **Manse Steward**.*
 - (d) **Circuit Secretary**.*
- 10.40** *A Circuit may also have an Assistant Circuit Steward or Circuit Steward-designate, as determined from time-to-time by the Circuit Executive.*
- 10.41** *For legal purposes, Society Stewards shall also be considered Officials of the Circuit.*
- 10.42** *The term 'Circuit Executive' shall henceforth be deemed to include the term 'Quarterly Meeting', where appropriate throughout the Manual of Laws.*