

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

The 2009 Conference received this report on non-stipendiary ministry and endorsed its main conclusions.

Introduction

The Commission on Ministry brought its report to Conference 2007. Arising from that report Conference directed that “the Board of Examiners review the present procedures relating to Local Non-Stipendiary ministry in the light of issues raised about Local Ministry in the Report.” It further recommended that the Board bring a response and any recommendations to Conference in 2009.

This is the report of the Working Party who met in response to that Conference directive.

The Context

(a) Issues raised by the Commission on Ministry

The report from the Commission on Ministry

- Welcomed the “key role” of the Local Non-Stipendiary minister
- Noted the changing role of the Local Non-Stipendiary minister
- Recommended that the introduction of a category of Local Stipendiary minister be discussed
- Asked whether the term “local minister” would be more helpful terminology than Local Non-Stipendiary

The ensuing discussion in Conference highlighted the fact that the Connexion as a whole, and indeed local non-stipendiary ministers as a group, have a range of understandings of the nature of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry (for example is it a “supportive” ministry, enabling the church to do what it could not otherwise do, or do Local Non-Stipendiary ministers function in exactly the same way as Stipendiary ministers).

The issue of stipend was also raised in the Conference discussion. “Non-stipendiary” has been interpreted in different ways in different local contexts.

(b) The experience of Local Non-Stipendiary ministers

The Working Party approached the review of the present procedures by circulating a questionnaire to all Local Non-Stipendiary ministers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish the working patterns of Local Non-Stipendiary ministers, to explore Local Non-Stipendiary ministers’ understanding of their role and to offer opportunity to these ministers to raise issues they wished to see addressed.

Eleven questionnaires were distributed and eight replies were received.

The answers to the questionnaire identified a variety of working patterns regarding hours (although the majority worked about 30 hours per week) and

conditions. A number noted their enjoyment of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry and the fact that they were grateful for the opportunity of this ministry. However a number of concerns were also identified. These included:

- the name
- the need to prepare circuits when receiving a Local Non-Stipendiary minister
- expenses: in that there appeared to be inconsistency within the Connexion
- the apparent anomaly of paying pastoral workers and not Local Non-Stipendiary ministers.

History

The Methodist Church in Ireland began its journey towards accepting this category of ministry in 1976 when the Conference accepted in principle the concept of 'part time' ministry. This decision arose out of the recommendation of the 'Commission on The Ministry' report that had been set up by the 1974 Conference.

In 1976, the Conference adopted both the principle and a reasoned statement called the 'Definition of part-time Ministry.' However, the Conference of 1979 directed that the principle of what had now been termed 'Local Ministry' be not proceeded with at present, and the matter remitted to the Faith and Order Committee.

By 1987 the Faith and Order Committee had reported back to Conference and the Conference of 1991 finally approved the establishment of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry.

The Working Party recognised that in the years since the first of the Local Non-Stipendiary ministers commenced circuit ministry differing working patterns and expectations from both circuit and minister had led to a variety of arrangements and expectations.

What is our understanding of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry?

A crucial question with which the Working Party wrestled was "what is our understanding of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry"? Two fundamental issues quickly emerged:

1. The Working Party wanted to affirm the immense value of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry and to thank God for the gift which that form of ordained ministry is to the Church and God's Kingdom.
2. The Working Party wanted to affirm equality of status between the two forms of presbyteral ministry recognised by the Methodist Church in Ireland.

There was, however, an unresolved question of what then is the distinctive feature of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry? Three possibilities were considered:

1. That the distinguishing feature is itinerancy. This was rejected as, while there are normally limits on the stationing of Local Non-Stipendiary ministers to allow them to live in their own homes, both modes of ministry are itinerant and subject to stationing.

2. That the distinguishing feature is “part-time”. Currently Local Non-stipendiary ministry is the only way the MCI has of facilitating ministry in part-time appointments. While it is true that local non-stipendiary ministry is currently the only way in which MCI offers the opportunity of ministry in part-time appointments, not all Local Non-Stipendiary ministers are part-time and more significantly the Working Party was reluctant to equate part-time with non-stipendiary.

Therefore it was decided that the Working Party would recommend that the Connexion consider the development of ordained ministry in part-time appointments as a separate issue to local non-stipendiary ministry.

3. That the distinguishing feature is “non-stipendiary”. The concept of a “tent-making” ministry appears to have been significant in the understanding of Conference as the concept of local non-stipendiary ministry developed. For example, the 1976 Conference acknowledged that this ministry was neither *‘new nor radical. In the early years of the church the majority of its ministers were men and women who supported themselves in some secular occupation’*

Paul himself makes reference to how he carried out his trade of ‘Tent Making’ to secure financial support for his life and ministry.¹ Indeed, Paul goes one stage further when he alludes to the fact that not only did he work to support himself, but that he undertook work to support those who ministered with him.²

For Paul the tapestry of his life was woven through his experiences as a hard working tentmaker as much as from his experiences of being an evangelist. In his everyday life, Paul did not recognise any clear division between the sacred and the secular.

In the light of Scripture and the historical development of this mode of ministry within the Methodist Church in Ireland the Working Party believes that the concept of “tent-making” ministry remains at the heart of an understanding of Local Non-Stipendiary ministry. The feature of non-stipendiary is the one that distinguishes the two forms of ordained ministry. This has a number of implications:

1. *This theological understanding fundamentally affects the way the Connexion understands this form of ministry. Some people will be*

¹ 1 Cor 9: 1-18 Paul reminds the Corinthians that he did not claim his rights of hospitality etc. but gave them up for the sake of the gospel and instead chose to work to support himself.

² Acts 20: 34 Paul refers to how he has used his hands to supply the needs of his companions as well as his own needs.

- called to a tent-making ministry, perhaps for the whole of their ministry perhaps for periods of their ministry. They are called to be tent-makers.*
2. *It follows therefore that the terminology should be Stipendiary and Non-Stipendiary*

Affirmation

The Working Party affirms that Non-Stipendiary ministry is a gift to the Church. It provides an opportunity to develop pioneer ministries and to maintain and develop existing ministries.

Recommendations

The Working Party recommends reaffirmation of the equal status of all ministers ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament and in Full Connexion with the Conference.

The Methodist Church in Ireland recognises one order of ordained ministry; this presbyteral ministry can be exercised in two ways:

- (a) Stipendiary Ministry: this is presbyteral ministry in which ministers can be stationed across Ireland and for which a stipend is given.
- (b) Non-Stipendiary ministry: this is presbyteral ministry which is “tent-making”, in that ministers feel called by God to support themselves while exercising ordained ministry. This is in accordance with the Pauline example. Non-Stipendiary ministers are normally stationed within 30 miles of their own homes and continue to live in those homes. An essential aspect of this ministry is that it is self-supporting, therefore no stipend is offered.
Non-Stipendiary ministers are free to offer as much time as they are able to a circuit but shall offer a minimum of 2 Sunday Services a month and two sessions (a session being roughly equivalent to a morning afternoon or evening) a week to the circuit in which they are stationed.

The Working Party recommends that any minister may transfer from one mode of ministry to the other.

Any minister who wishes to transfer between modes of ministry shall make application to the Special Committee through the Secretary of Conference, by writing to the Secretary of Conference by 30th September detailing the reasons for their request.

The Working Party recognises that some additional regulations are necessary with regard to Non-Stipendiary ministers:

- (a) A Working Agreement should be established between the Non-Stipendiary minister and the Circuit in every case. This working agreement should cover

expected working patterns and the agreed reimbursement of expenses including mileage, direct expenses and any other agreed indirect expenses.

(b) The Stationing Process: The Non-Stipendiary minister should make clear to their stationer any particular issues relevant to their stationing- for example the amount of time for which they are available to the Circuit. The stationer is responsible for liaising with the “receiving” stationer.

At the beginning of March there should be a meeting with the local Church officials, Circuit Superintendent, and two stationers to ensure clarity and begin process of drafting a working agreement. (The Working Agreement pro-forma is available from the Secretary of Conference.)

The Secretary of Conference is responsible for ensuring that a clear working agreement is in place with a church receiving a Non-Stipendiary minister by the 15th May in the year of the change.

(c) There is no entitlement to a manse but if a manse is available, he/she may avail of it with the agreement of the Home Mission Department and the Circuit concerned.

(d) No contributions to the funds of the Church which exist for the support of the itinerant Ministry shall be required and no benefits therefrom shall be available.

(e) Expenses shall be reimbursed by the circuit in accordance with the scale determined by the Stipends and Allowances Board.

(f) He/She may hold such offices in the District Synod and the Conference as her/his employment permits.

(g) At any point the Non-Stipendiary minister may request a meeting with the Special Committee with the purpose of reviewing ministry and addressing any particular questions.

In addition the Non-Stipendiary minister must apply through the Secretary of Conference to Special Committee if:

1. they are seeking other employment within the Methodist Church in Ireland;
2. their employment is changing.

In the event of a transfer in employment location during the Connexional Year, the situation shall be considered by the Special Committee which shall advise the Stationing Committee and the President of the Church to take such action as may be necessary always under the regulations of the Church.

(h) In the Minutes of Conference List of Stations, when a Non-Stipendiary minister is appointed to a station where a ‘Line’ exists, that the line be printed after the name of the minister

The Working Party strongly recommends that the Connexion consider the development of ministry in part-time appointments.