

The Office of President of the Conference (and of the Methodist Church in Ireland)

Election and Installation:

At its Annual Conference, after a nomination process, the members vote, by secret ballot, for the presbyter whom they believe should be designated for appointment to the office of President of Conference twelve months hence. The person elected then has twelve months in which, alongside his/her normal duties, he/she prayerfully prepares and becomes involved in a number of the committees which carry out the Connexion's work (including the General Committee, Board of Examiners, Stationing Committee and Faith and Order Committee).

At the following Conference the designation of the President is confirmed by Standing Vote. He/she proceeds to the front, accompanied by two former Presidents, where, after the reading of Scripture (John 21: 15-17) the following prayer is said:

"Almighty God, giver of all good things, by the Holy Spirit you have appointed different offices in your Church. Graciously behold this your servant now called to the office of President of the Methodist Church in Ireland. So fill him with grace and the truth of your doctrine that, both by word and deed, he may faithfully serve you in this office, and use the authority given to him to the glory of your name and the encouragement of your Church, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen."

The outgoing President places a gown (or a Presidential Scarf) on the shoulders of his successor with the words:

"The Lord clothe you with the Holy Spirit for the office and work now committed to you by the authority of the Church."

He hands a Bible to his successor saying:

"Think on the things contained in this Book. Be guided by its truth, that through this Word there may be increase in Christ's Kingdom."

Role:

As the title suggests the President presides at the Conference, where the Communal episkope of the Methodist Church is most fully exercised. (From 2010 the task of presiding will be shared with a Lay Leader). Two specific roles of the President during the Conference may be of particular note.

First, when probationary ministers are being formally presented for reception into Full Connexion and Ordination they are examined by the President (along with some colleagues). Whereas this is a short meeting in comparison with the years of testing and training which have preceded it we acknowledge a particular role for the President in assent to their Ordination.

Second, the President presides at the Ordination as the chief ordaining minister and is the one who declares, “*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I declare that you have been ordained as Presbyters of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ.*”

Throughout the period of office the President is acknowledged as having a particular role of leadership throughout the Church, which is primarily exercised through visits to Circuits and other public bodies.

In terms of church governance the President chairs the General Committee, the Stationing Committee the Faith and Order Committee and the Board of Examiners, and thus has an element of accountability for the decisions they make. In cases of emergency the President, having consulted with an Advisory Committee, is personally empowered to act with the authority of the Conference.

Lifelong:

Whereas a new President is elected at each Conference, and the outgoing President returns to his/her former responsibilities, there are aspects of the office which do not cease at the end of the year.

First, should an incumbent President die during the year or become incapable of acting the immediate ex-President steps into the role.

Second, former Presidents retain automatic membership of the Conference for a period, in recognition of their ongoing particular personal role. Up until fifteen years ago this was seen as lifelong membership, and those who served as President up to 1995 still have this privilege. In an attempt to reduce Conference numbers this automatic membership was then restricted to five years.

Third, the practice of the Methodist Church in Britain, where former Presidents of Conference are the only ministers entitled to preside at the several ordination services which are held at the same time, gives an indication of the approach of the Methodist Church in Ireland were such an arrangement necessary.

Within the culture of the Methodist Church in Ireland those who have served as President are often recognized as such, not least by their formal procession and presence at the Installation service for the incoming President.