

## APPENDIX 11

### THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND CODE OF PASTORAL PRACTICE

Published at the direction of the Conference of 1988 for the information of Ministers, Circuit Stewards and Society Stewards. (Revised 2020)

#### **Introduction**

Each year, as part of their discipline, ministers are asked to affirm that they 'are not in debt'. The roots of this promise are in the beginnings of itinerancy, where ministers who moved frequently sometimes left debts in village shops which damaged the reputation of the Methodist Church and for which the colleague who followed them became responsible. The regulations dealing with the duties of a minister are set out in the Manual of Laws.

This Code of Pastoral Practice fulfils this principle recognised by our forebears, that itinerant ministers should be mindful of those who follow them in a station and do all they can to make that transition a good one for the minister and the Circuit.

#### **Mutual Support**

Paragraph 5.01 reminds us that:

- (a) ministers are colleagues in the work of the Gospel.
- (b) ministers are to defend each other's character and reputation.
- (c) ministers are to be loyal to each other in the discharge of their ministerial duties.
- (d) ministers should not undermine the unity of purpose within the ministry whatever their individual interests.

#### **Itinerancy**

The Conference recognises that itinerancy is an essential principle of the life and well being of the Methodist Church. While recognising there is an element of flexibility within the stationing process, this can nevertheless be a cause of tension and apprehension for Ministers and their families. The Conference believes, however, that there is sensitivity and pastoral care exercised within the process.

#### **Stationing**

(a) When a Minister is being moved, the question of a successor should be a matter for discussion between the Circuit and the District Superintendent.

(b) Equally, her/his own future appointment should be a matter for discussion between him/her and the District Superintendent.

(c) All discussions and consultations should be confidential.

(d) Only when the draft of stations is published should the outgoing Minister liaise with her/his proposed successor concerning the change over.

(e) At that stage the stewards may be encouraged to make contact with the proposed incoming Minister, recognising that the draft might be subsequently changed.

## **Leaving an Appointment**

Any Minister leaving a Circuit for a new appointment:

- (a) should recognise that the newly appointed minister has sole responsibility for that Circuit.
- (b) should avoid any interference or involvement in her/his former appointment.
- (c) should not return to her/his previous Circuit to conduct weddings, funerals or baptisms, for pastoral visitation or any other function deemed to be part of the duties of the newly appointed Minister.
- (d) should not return for weddings, baptisms, confirmations, etc. even when these have been arranged in advance of her/his leaving the Circuit and are due to take place after he/she has left the Circuit. These should be performed by the newly appointed Minister.
- (e) should not accept an invitation to return to her/his previous circuit unless it is issued directly by the newly appointed Minister.

## **Handing Over to a Successor**

There are a number of areas that need to be addressed in handing over responsibilities to a successor. The following includes necessary issues but there will be further consideration necessary in relation to the specific context of any appointment.

- (a) Arrange a meeting so that incoming minister and any family where applicable can view manse and have access to the manse book or equivalent. This initial meeting should take place as soon as possible after the publication of the Draft of Stations.
- (b) Offer local advice, as requested, on a wide range of issues such as schooling, utility providers.
- (c) Arrange a meeting to discuss ministry matters in the appointment including pastoral matters, local school or chaplaincy involvement, community involvement and mission plans in place or in development.
- (d) Draw attention to any significant missional opportunities or challenges in the life of the circuit/appointment. This includes detailing any issues that need to be addressed, and why they have not been addressed prior to handover.
- (e) Draw attention to any immediate pastoral concerns that the new minister will need to attend to.
- (f) Draw attention to any ongoing or recently past Safeguarding issues and ensure all documents are handed over.
- (g) Offer comment on relationships with other local churches.
- (h) Ensure the membership book or electronic list is accurate, up to date and available, and share any electronic records.
- (i) Ensure all records are up to date including an accurate, up to date and available list of office holders.
- (j) Be available to answer promptly any queries that might be raised by your successor as they become established in their new appointment.

## **Responsibilities within Circuits**

- (a) The Superintendent has full responsibility for the Circuit, with oversight from the District Superintendent.

(b) Any Minister appointed to a Circuit is responsible to the Superintendent of the Circuit to which he/she is appointed. The Circuit Superintendent and all other ministers are responsible to the District Superintendent.

(c) No Minister shall be involved with another Circuit without the invitation of the Superintendent of that Circuit.

(d) In the event of the death of a Minister or Minister's spouse, the incumbent Minister (if he/she is not the Superintendent) shall immediately inform the Superintendent of the Circuit. The Superintendent shall immediately inform the District Superintendent, who shall inform the President and Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Ministerial Secretary of the pension fund.

(e) Superintendents of Circuits should keep in close contact with Circuit colleagues, supporting and overseeing their work. This is especially the case where a colleague is a Probationer. The Superintendent is responsible for supporting and overseeing all areas of their work, and assisting them in their ongoing development as Ministers of the Gospel.

### **Use of Time**

Since much of a Minister's work is unstructured, it is imperative that Ministers take care to be fully organised so that essential tasks are addressed and priorities given the necessary allocation of time. These tasks include:

(a) the Minister's own spiritual and devotional life

(b) reading and study

(c) understanding their local context and leading the mission of the congregations in their care

(d) preparation for worship (baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals and Circuit responsibilities, etc.)

(e) oversight and offering of pastoral care

(f) community and connexional responsibilities

(g) family and leisure time

Time is not unlimited, so it is essential to apportion it according to priorities that are agreed with the Circuit Executive and the District Superintendent, recognising that there will always be the emergencies which inevitably alter a pre-prepared timetable.

### **Use of the Manse**

The Manse is provided by the Church as a home for the Minister and her/his family. The use of the Manse for Church meetings where appropriate or necessary should be at the invitation and discretion of the Minister and should not provide a precedent for her/his successor. Normally any Church meetings will happen in the Church or associated rooms.

The Minister should ensure that the Manse and its contents are properly cared for during her/his tenure. Each minister, when changing appointment, should leave the Manse and grounds as he/she would like to find them.

The Minister's spouse can, like any other member of the congregation, play an important role in the life of the Church, but he/she should not be regarded as an unpaid member of staff. Most Minister's spouses have a career outside the life of the Church, and it should be recognised that Minister's spouses have different gifts and interests and may wish to have different roles in the life of the Circuit.

### **Connexional Discipline**

When Ministers affirm that they observe the discipline they are accepting the undertaking to administer the Church's work at Circuit, District and Connexional level.

This includes care in responding promptly to all communication, and dealing efficiently with all administrative matters.

It is advisable that, as far as possible, Ministers should not handle money belonging to the circuit.

Membership of District and Connexional Committees should be regarded as a privilege which provides both responsibility and opportunity to serve the wider church.

### **Relationship with the Circuit**

It is important that Ministers work closely with Circuit officials, committees and councils to establish a good relationship and have a mutual understanding of each other's expectations. It is very important to set agreed goals to work towards and monitor missional impact. The chief priority is engaging in mission, seeking to make new followers of Jesus Christ and incorporating them into the life of the Methodist Church. A mission plan, supported by the District Superintendent, is the normal way this will be addressed. Another priority is to ensure appropriate and effective pastoral care is undertaken, including those who are ill and recently bereaved.

### **The Representative Role of the Minister**

The Minister has a representative role in the wider community, not just in relation to the local congregation, Circuit and the Methodist Church in Ireland, but most of all of Jesus Christ. This is shared with all Christians and is a key part of our wider mission. The Minister should not spend their time solely engaged in the internal life of their circuit but is required to engage in the wider community at a variety of levels to help share the good news of Jesus with all. At all times the minister must remember their conduct reflects on the reputation of both Church and more importantly, Jesus Christ. The representative role of the minister also is related to their use of social media. It is important that comments made and pictures posted, are appropriate and helpful to the sharing of the gospel.