

**CONSTITUTION OF  
THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND**

SECTION I

**THE METHODIST CHURCH**

The Church of Christ is the Company of His Disciples, consisting of all those who accept Him as the Son of God and their Saviour from sin, and who unite in loving fellowship, and strive to promote the Kingdom of God. It includes the blessed company of all faithful people, not only those sojourning on earth but the saints departed who live unto God. The Visible Church consists of all persons throughout the world who profess to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and to live obedient to the precepts of His Word, together with their children. Though gathered in many folds, and differing in race and language, and differing also in doctrine and usage, there subsists notwithstanding "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church," united in "the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." Among the living branches of the Church of Christ, the Methodist Church with its missionary and daughter Churches in many lands holds a responsible and influential place.

The Methodist Church had its origin in the eighteenth century in an extensive revival of experimental and practical religion consequent on the labours of Rev. John Wesley and his colleagues and followers, and was introduced into Ireland in the year 1747. The revival produced, in the minds and hearts of those who were the subjects of it, an earnest striving after holiness, a desire for Christian fellowship, and a passion for evangelisation. In seeking to attain these objects the early Methodists reproduced in a simple and unstudied way the modes of Church life indicated in the New Testament, and under the guidance of God's Spirit the Methodist Societies gradually developed into a distinct and strongly featured Church. Methodism imposes no new terms or narrow tests upon the people of God, but asserts that the desire for salvation is the condition of entrance into the Church of Christ, and that the practice of Christian love and service is an indispensable condition of abiding therein.

For the leadership and oversight of His people in the work of God's Kingdom, our Lord appointed the Apostles; and after these, as need arose, others were chosen for various offices in the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the concurrence of the local communities. The Christian ministry thus originated has continued, with many adaptations of name and function unto this day. Christ's Ministers in the Church are Stewards in the Household of God and Shepherds of His Flock. In the Methodist Church a separated and ordained ministry is recognised as being in full accord with New Testament principles and necessary for the proper maintenance and promotion of the work of God. But every member of the Church is equal in spir-

itual privilege, has the same access to God through Christ, and is charged with the duty of establishing His Kingdom upon earth. The acknowledgment of this spiritual equality in the Methodist Church has led to the recognition of laypersons as being of an equal status with ministers in all the Courts of the Church.

The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are of divine institution, and in them the presence of Christ through His Spirit is realised by the faith of His people.

## SECTION II

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEF**

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic faith, and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that, in the Providence of God, Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith, and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning, and still holds, are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church, ministerial and lay, are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.

The Notes on the New Testament and the forty-four Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.

The Conference is the final authority within the Church with regard to all questions concerning the interpretation of its doctrines.

## SECTION III

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The members of the Methodist Church in Ireland are those who, desiring to be saved from their sins through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to associate themselves with the people of God in Christian fellowship, have been received into full membership in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Conference. The baptised

children of such persons also are Junior members of the Church, and it is their duty and privilege when they reach the age of discretion to enter into full membership.

#### SECTION IV

### THE MINISTRY

In the Methodist Church in Ireland a Minister is constituted by the Call of God, the consent of the members of the Church, the election of the Conference, and the ordination to the office and work of a Minister in the Church of God by prayer and the laying on of hands.

The Conference has power to make from time to time such rules and regulations for the admission, probation, discipline, appointment, expulsion and retirement of Ministers as may seem right.

#### SECTION V

### THE COURTS OF THE CHURCH

The Courts of the Church and the membership thereof are determined from time to time by the Conference in such manner as it may determine. All Members and Ministers of the Church are subject to its government and discipline, and are under the jurisdiction and care of the appropriate Courts of the Church in all matters of Doctrine, Worship, Discipline, and Order in accordance with Rules and Regulations from time to time made by the Conference.

Historically, the principal Courts of the Church were as follows: —

The Classes in a locality were grouped into a Society, the administration of which was entrusted to a Leaders' Meeting, which consisted of the Minister or Ministers, and such Society Officers, Class Leaders, Local Preachers, and other members as may be appointed under the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.

One or more Societies in a larger area may constitute a Circuit, the administrative body of which was the Quarterly Meeting. This meeting consisted of the Ministers on the Circuit, Circuit Stewards and such Society Officers, Class Leaders, Local Preachers, Trustees of the various properties and other members as may be appointed under the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.

Circuits have traditionally been grouped in accordance with the rules of Conference into Districts, with the business of each District administered by a District Synod. The membership of a District Synod consisted of all the Ministers in the area, together with Lay Representatives appointed in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Conference. The Synods considered matters relating to their areas and made recommendations and suggestions to the Conference in re-

lation thereto. There has also been a Ministerial Session of each Synod, consisting of all the Ministers and probationers resident in the area. The powers, duties and privileges of the Synods are set forth in the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.

There have also traditionally been Sunday School Teachers' Meetings, Local Preachers' Meetings, Trustee Meetings, and other Boards and Committees, the functions of which are determined either by legal instruments or by the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.

Subject to such Rules and Regulations as the Conference may make from time to time, the constitution of the Courts of the Church and the Rules and Regulations regarding them may be altered by the Conference from time to time in such manner as it may determine.

## SECTION VI

### THE CONFERENCE

1. The Governing Body of the Methodist Church in Ireland is the Conference, constituted in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Conference from time to time.
2. The Conference consists of two Sessions, a Ministerial Session and a Representative Session.
  - (a) The Conference in its Ministerial Session consists of the President of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Great Britain (hereinafter referred to as the British Conference) and the Ministers appointed by that Conference to accompany her/him; all the Ministers who are members of the Representative Session, together with such other Ministers as may be permitted to attend under the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.
  - (b) The Conference in its Representative Session consists of the President of the British Conference and the Representatives appointed by that Conference, together with not less than 100 nor more than 150 Ministers and an equal number of Lay Members elected or appointed in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Conference.
3. In those matters which are specifically appointed for the consideration of each session the decisions of that session are taken and had to be the decisions of the Conference.

4. The business of the Conference in its Ministerial Sessions, and as to which the decision of that Session is final, consists of—
  - (i) All and every matter relating to the Admission, Probation, Discipline, Appointment, Expulsion, and Retirement of Ministers, save and except that the final vote on the reception into Full Connexion with the Conference and ordination of candidates for the ministry shall be taken in the Representative Session, on the recommendation of the Ministerial Session.
  - (ii) All appeals on matters of discipline relating to members of the Church.
  - (iii) All Ministerial and Pastoral subjects of like nature with any of those specified in this section, or affecting the Ministerial or Pastoral work of the Church. In all cases wherein there may be doubt as to the Session of Conference to which a matter belongs, the President decides.
  - (iv) The making of Rules and Regulations and the appointment of Committees (including the appointment of lay persons to the membership of such committees as the Conference may decide) in relation to any of the matters appointed for the Ministerial Session.
5. The business of the Conference in its Representative Session consists of all matters pertaining to the government and management of the Church, except such as are reserved for the decision of the Ministerial Session.
6. The stated meeting of the Conference shall be held annually in the month of June upon such date and at such place as shall be determined by the preceding annual Conference. Any necessary change in the time or place of meeting of the Annual Conference may be made by the President and Secretary, with the approval of the General Committee of Management or its Sub-Committee. In cases of emergency an extraordinary meeting of the Conference may be convened by the same authority, the membership of which shall be that of the last preceding Annual Conference.
7. (i) The Officers of the Conference are a President, a Secretary and a Lay Leader. The President is elected by the Conference in accordance with its Rules and Regulations. The term of office of the President commences upon her/his induction and terminates upon the induction of her/his successor.
  - (ii) The minister elected to be President of the Conference thereby becomes the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and he/she presides over the Conference and signs the records thereof. He/she is empowered to make appointments from the Reserve of accepted candidates for the ministry to Circuits in

cases where vacancies may occur therein in the interval between one Conference and another.

(iii) The Secretary of the Conference is the Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and is elected by the Conference in accordance with its Rules and Regulations. He/she is responsible for arranging and introducing the business of the Conference; for having a correct record made of its proceedings; for the accuracy of the printed Minutes as a record of its decisions and the subjects to which they relate, and for such other duties as the Conference may from time to time prescribe, or as are usually performed by the Secretary thereof. He/she continues in office until his re-election, or the election of his successor at the ensuing Conference.

(iv) The Lay Leader of the Conference is elected by the Conference in accordance with its rules and regulations. The term of office of the Lay Leader commences upon her/his induction and terminates upon the induction of her/his successor.

(v) The Conference may also elect or appoint such Assistant Secretaries, Letter Writers, or other officers as it may consider necessary.

(vi) The Conference may from time to time make such regulations as it may consider expedient for the discharge of the duties of any officer in case of the illness, absence or death of such officer.

(vii) Forty members of the Conference, twenty of them being ministers, present at the time and place of meeting, constitute a quorum and are competent to transact business.

8. The Journal of the Conference, after confirmation by the Conference, is signed by the President or Acting President and by the Secretary or Acting Secretary. A separate journal is kept of the proceedings of the Ministerial Session, and is similarly signed, after confirmation, in that Session. The said Journals shall be deemed to be authoritative records of all acts of the Conference, and such journals so subscribed shall be taken and received for all purposes whatsoever as conclusive evidence of the acts and proceedings of the Conference. But no admissions, expulsions or appointments shall be enforceable until the Journal shall have been signed.
9. The Conference has power from time to time, and subject to such regulations as it shall prescribe, to make, revoke and vary Rules and Regulations, not conflicting or inconsistent with this Constitution, for its own procedure, for appointments to departmental or other offices, for the raising, management and distribution of the funds under its control, and for the management of its Institutions

or Departments, and for, or relating to, the membership, discipline and general organisation of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and the last published edition of the Manual of the Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church in Ireland (or as regards any Rules or Regulations made, altered or amended since the last publication of such Manual, the printed Minutes of Conference containing same) shall be conclusive evidence for all purposes whatsoever of such Rules and Regulations having been made by the Conference

10. As provided for in Par. 4 (iv) and 5 the Conference has also the power in both the Ministerial and Representative Sessions to appoint such and so many Committees from time to time as may be considered necessary for the despatch of business, and to define the powers and duties which each such Committee shall possess and discharge, also the number of members to serve on each Committee, the number of members whose attendance shall be necessary to make a quorum of the said Committees, the mode of giving or sending notices for, and the times, places and manner of their meetings and respecting the general conduct and management or control of business affairs, and to delegate to any such Committee all or any of the powers of the Conference.
11. The Conference may alter or amend its Constitution from time to time as it may consider necessary. But no proposal for such alteration or amendment may be considered unless notice thereof shall have been given in writing to the Secretary at the preceding Conference.

## SECTION VII

### THE ITINERANCY

1. The principle of the Itinerancy, being essential to the life and well-being of the Church, is maintained by the yearly appointment of Ministers.
2. In all cases in which supplies may become necessary in the course of the year for a Circuit or any other appointment made by Conference, the application therefor shall be made to the President of the Conference through the Superintendent of the District in which the supply is needed.
3. The President of the Conference shall have power, subject to the Rules and Regulations of the Conference for the time being, and on the advice of the Emergency Committee appointed by the Conference for the purpose, to make arrangements to fill vacancies until the next succeeding Conference, or for such less period as may be deemed advisable, by withdrawing and transferring Ministers appointed to other Circuits, appointing candidates from the List of Reserve of accepted candidates for the Ministry, or appointing Ministers from other Departments of Ministerial Service, or Ministers returning temporarily or

permanently from Overseas Work, or by all or any of such methods, and, in all cases in which the Superintendency of a Circuit shall be or become involved or affected, to determine who is to be the Superintendent of such Circuit for the balance of the year.

4. Pursuant to sub-section (a) of Section 5 of the Methodist Church in Ireland Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 and the Methodist Church in Ireland Act (Saorstát Éireann) 1928, it shall be lawful for the Conference to appoint any Minister to the use and enjoyment of any Church or premises belonging to or held in trust for the purpose of the Church for any number of years successively always subject to and in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Conference for the time being.