



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Related To The New
Connexional Structures*



THE METHODIST CHURCH
IN IRELAND



GOD IS AT WORK

God is at work in and through the Methodist Church in Ireland; we see that in the faithful witness of congregations in villages, towns and cities across this island. We see and hear of God at work as lives are transformed, and communities impacted through the work of Christians. We see God at work in congregations and individuals prayerfully wrestling with what it means to be faithful to God in their communities.

Over many years, as a Church family we have kept coming back to the question, “Could we be organising ourselves better, particularly in a way that releases resources locally and which helps us respond to the opportunities and challenges we are facing”

One generation shall laud your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:4

Conference in June 2018 agreed a set of proposals by which:

- (i) The eight current Districts will be joined into three geographically and numerically viable Districts;
- (ii) A full-time separated District Superintendent is appointed for each District to provide oversight, leadership support and Connexional vision for the mission and ministry of Societies, Circuits and ministers;
- (iii) The current District administrative layer is re-defined to reflect contemporary practice and make it fit for purpose, and;

- (iv) A “Connexional Team” is created to enable more effective collaboration and efficient decision making across the Connexion.

We are grateful to God for the people who have been designated as District Superintendents. They are Rev W Philip Agnew (North Eastern), Rev Andrew J Dougherty (Southern) and Rev Dr Stephen F Skuce (North Western). However, neither they themselves, nor indeed structural change in isolation, is ‘the answer’ to the challenges and many opportunities we face as a denomination. It is the breath of God’s Spirit which brings life and throughout this period of change our challenge, indeed the invitation before us, is to keep our eyes on God, our Creator, Saviour and Sustainer. As the new structures developed we have asked each other hard and helpful questions as we sought to discern God’s way forward together. This booklet, which accompanies the Roadshows taking place across the Connexion, contains answers to a number of those ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ Our hope is that the booklet will clarify the processes which are developing and more importantly develop our understanding of the potential, which under God we believe is in these new structures. We look forward to seeing God’s continuing work in and through this part of God’s Church.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Related To The New Connexional Structures

District Superintendents

1. What difference will having full-time District Superintendents (DS) make?

Having full-time District Superintendents will mean that, for the first time, we will have a person in each district whose sole job and permanent full-time focus will be on supporting and enabling local churches to fulfil their visions for mission. This should help us all to bring a greater focus to our mission work, to grow and learn together, and to operate on a Connexional basis in a more coordinated manner. It should also mean that individual circuit superintendents and ministers are freed from some of their administrative burdens and committee obligations, thus enabling them to focus more clearly on the core work of mission in their communities.

2. What will be the primary focus of the DS?

The primary focus of the DS is to serve the MCI by "encouraging, enabling, coordinating and implementing the Church's vision for missional discipleship". The new structures are being introduced in the context of both a renewed emphasis on mission within our church, and the reality that we face significant challenges in that, overall, our church is facing a decline in numbers and effectiveness. The new DSs will be firmly

focussed on these two areas while proactively seeking opportunities for mission and witness.

3. What duties will a DS have?

In summary, the DS is charged with encouraging, enabling, co-ordinating and facilitating mission within her/his district. He/she will work to ensure that districts are operating effectively, that individual circuits are focused on their core work and that ministers and circuits are supported. He/she will work closely with all members of the church, ministerial and lay, to achieve this. The full list of duties of the DS are set out in sections 10.16 - 10.19 of the Manual of Laws (see Appendix A).

4. What authority will a DS have?

Conference has given the DS the responsibility of ensuring that all circuits within her/his district are achieving their full potential and he/she will be held to account for this by the Connexional Team and ultimately by Conference. In line with that responsibility the DSs have been granted full authority by Conference so that they may take any necessary steps to ensure the attainment of vision within their district. While a DS therefore does have authority over their district, they will always seek to exercise that authority "in cooperation with Circuit Executives and Circuit Superintendents" (Sec 10.16.a)

5. What happens if the DS is sick or on sabbatical?

In the case of prolonged absence, the President, on the advice of the Connexional Team, shall appoint an ordained minister of the District to serve as Temporary District Superintendent, on a part-time basis, until the DS returns or a new District Superintendent is appointed by Conference.

6. What happens if the DS is not up to the job?

Every DS is accountable to Conference through the Connexional Team and through the Secretary of Conference who acts as convenor and secretary of the Connexional Team. The Secretary of Conference is charged with ensuring that all on the Connexional Team, including the DSs, "fulfil the responsibilities with which Conference has entrusted it". As a member of the Connexional Team, the DS will face the same evaluation and oversight that all ministers do on an on-going basis. If the DS is clearly "not up to the job" then steps will be taken to rectify that situation.

7. If a minister/circuit/society has a disagreement with the DS, what process should be followed?

Such matters should firstly be discussed directly with the DS. Failing a resolution the minister/Circuit/Society can appeal the matter directly to the Connexional Team. The Connexional Team will have the final say in all such matters.

8. How often will the DS visit our church?

The DS will meet with ministers at least four times a year, including at District Ministerial Synod. It will be the intention of each DS to include church visits among these as often as possible each year during which visits he/she will expect to meet with lay church office holders in addition to the minister.

9. Who will handle the pastoral care of ministers, retired ministers, families etc.?

Each DS will initially assess the state of the current fellowship and pastoral support services within the district and will attempt to build upon those whenever possible.

10. How is the cost of DSs going to be met in the future?

The Connexional Finance Officer has calculated the cost of one full-time District Superintendent as £56,456 or €75,779 if based in the Republic of Ireland. This includes miscellaneous related costs and 15 hours a week administrative support. The necessary funding will come from three sources: 1. *savings from within the Comprehensive assessment*, 2. *income from funds and grants held by the Statutory Trustees* and 3. *money released from Home Mission Department because there is no longer a separated ministerial Home Mission Secretary. The Connexional Finance Committee will keep this situation under continuous review.*

Ministers

11. What duties/authority will a Circuit Superintendent have?

A Circuit Superintendent is required to oversee, lead and enable individual societies within their circuit as they seek to fulfil the missional vision of MCI. They are also required to provide pastoral support for individual ministers and their families within their circuit.

12. Will the duties of ordained ministers be affected by the new structures?

The duties of ordained ministers are set out in Chapter 5.A of the Manual of Laws and these have not changed. In general, however, it may be said that one of the intentions behind the new structures is to free up ministers and the new DSs will actively work to ensure that this will occur.

13. How will stationing change?

There are no substantive changes to the laws regarding stationing except that from July 2019 onwards all matters pertaining to stationing will be dealt with by a sub-group of the Connexional Team comprising the President of Conference, the Lay Leader of Conference, the Secretary of Conference, the President-Designate of Conference, the District Superintendents and the Director of Ministry. This subgroup will make annual recommendations to Conference for the following year and for subsequent years.

Those who attended Conference 2018 will be aware of proposals to change the stationing process that will be further discussed at Conference 2019. At this point, these matters are separate from the implementation of the new district structure and Connexional team

14. If a member/society/circuit has a disagreement with (their) its minister, what process should be followed?

All procedures relating to conflict within the church, for example the "Dignity in the Church Policy" (Appendix 13 of Manual of Laws), will continue to apply with the procedure being channelled through the DS. In general it can be said that disagreements should first be ironed out between the parties involved with the help of the Circuit Superintendent. Should that fail, the next step in the process is the referral of the matter to the DS.

15. Have the processes concerning discipline been changed or added to?

There are no significant changes to the processes dealing with questions of discipline except in so far as all such matters will now come under the remit of the District Superintendent (Section 10.09) and be channelled directly through him/her.

Connexional Team

16. Who is on the Connexional Team and what is their role?

The make-up and duties of the Connexional Team are set out in Appendix B, however, in summary, the purpose of the Connexional Team is to serve the Methodist Church in Ireland by enabling, coordinating and implementing the Churches' vision for mission and discipleship. The Connexional Team will pursue this purpose by supporting the DSs in their work in order to ensure that MCI moves ahead on an all-Ireland basis in a coordinated and unified manner. The Connexional Team will meet on a monthly basis from July 2019 onwards.

Property

17. How will a circuit process a Property Application?

All property applications will be processed through the District Superintendent. Circuits may have informal contacts with agents of the Property Board but the channel for applications will be through the DS.

Changes to the Home Mission Department

18. How will a circuit process a Home Mission Application?

All Home Mission applications will be processed through the District Superintendent who will work closely with the Home Mission Department

19. Who will prepare/collate Prayer Focus/Home Mission publicity?

This will remain the responsibility of the Home Mission Department.

20. Who will deal with Manse issues? How does the circuit apply for a grant for a Manse?

Responsibility for general maintenance lies with the circuit. Issues relating to substantive renovations or the sale or purchase of manses should be routed through the DS using the current grant application forms and procedures. The DS will liaise closely with the Home Mission Department and the Property Board on the processing of such applications.

21. How will the DS promote Mission within the district?

The role of the DS is to encourage, enable, coordinate and implement the Church's vision for mission. The DS will not however, seek to dictate how that vision is to be achieved. Rather, he/she will work with each circuit and society to help them achieve their vision for mission in their area.

Changes to Synod

22. If there are no more Representative Sessions of Synod, will we not become more congregationally minded?

The ongoing focus of all our efforts must be on our vision for mission within and through MCI. The new structure aims to bring us together as a Connexion as we support each other. The DS will seek to work with everyone to ensure that a Connexional focus is maintained and that we will continue to be more than a collection of individual societies.

23. How will the Lay voice be heard?

It is the intention of the DS's to fully engage with all members of MCI, both lay and ministerial, in pursuit of our vision of a mission led church. In addition, each DS will appoint a District Lay Leader or Leaders who will assist and support her/him in his/her work.

24. Will there be a Lay Leader in every district and what will they do?

Yes, there will be a Lay Leader in every district. The District Lay Leader will be appointed annually. The duties of the District Lay Leader are summarised in Appendix C, however her/his primary role is to support the District Superintendent in whatever way they can within the district.

25. How will annual reports from Connexional Departments be disseminated? What if I want to comment upon or react to same?

All such reports will be circulated by the District Superintendent who will liaise closely with circuits, on an ongoing basis, to hear their views and to feed those views back.

26. Retired ministers are no longer required or obliged to attend Synod. Does this mean that their voices will no longer be heard?

No, it does not. Just because there is no longer an obligation on retired ministers to attend Synod does not mean that they are not welcome to attend and that their views will not be given due consideration. It would be a foolish DS who would ignore the depth of experience and commitment represented by retired ministers.

27. What end-of-year schedules need to be completed and returned?

For the moment, all the usual schedules must be completed. However, it is our hope that these can be re-examined for next year and only those that are strictly necessary and useful will be retained.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Duties of District Superintendents

(as set out in the Manual of Laws, 2019, can be accessed at irishmethodist.org)

10.07

The District Superintendent shall:

- (a) encourage, enable, co-ordinate and facilitate mission in the Circuits of the District, in cooperation with the Circuit Executives and Circuit Superintendents;
- (b) develop and implement vision for the District and, to that end, facilitate area or District-wide gatherings for strategic planning, fellowship and inspiration;
- (c) in consultation with the District Advisory Committee and subject to the approval of Conference, develop structures for the District appropriate to its needs, including, where appropriate, the appointment of a District Lay Leader;
- (d) in consultation with the officers of the Home Mission Department, utilise the District Home Mission budget to support mission and witness across the District;
- (e) facilitate pastoral care among the ministers and vocational lay workers on the District, and their families, in conjunction with Circuit Superintendents and other colleagues;
- (f) arrange for the holding of the Ministerial Synods on his/her District; preside over their deliberations, and see that business

is transacted in due order;

(g) arrange meetings with the ministers and probationers on their District at least four times per year, including the District Ministerial Synod and including at least one individual meeting with each probationer or minister who has not yet retired;

(h) serve as the public representative of the District.

10.08

District Superintendents shall:

exercise careful supervision of the working of the Circuits under their jurisdiction. A District Superintendent shall visit any Circuit Executive or Church Council in the District when he/she considers it desirable. District Superintendents will be provided with Minutes of all Circuit Executive meetings on their District.

10.09

District Superintendents shall:

ensure that Connexional discipline is upheld in accordance with the processes laid out in this Manual of Laws. To this end, where matters likely to affect adversely the well-being of any Circuit on his/her District are known to the District Superintendent, the following procedure shall be adopted:

[see Manual of Laws for details]

10.10

The District Superintendent shall:

- (a) represent the District on the Connexional Team;
- (b) ensure that Circuit questions are referred in a timely and correct manner to the appropriate Connexional committees;
- (c) ensure that Connexional policies are implemented on the District;
- (d) offer specific, individual skills as a resource to the Connexion, in consultation with the Connexional Team.

Appendix B:

The Connexional Team

(as set out in the Manual of Laws, 2019)

7.49

(a) The Connexional Team shall consist of the following members:

- The President of the Conference
- The Lay Leader of the Conference
- The Secretary of the Conference
- The Ex-President of the Conference
- The President-Designate of the Conference
- The immediate past Lay Leader or Lay Leader-designate
- The District Superintendents
- The Director of Ministry
- The General Secretary

of the Home Mission Department, when in a full-time separated appointment

- The General Secretary of the Irish Methodist Youth and Children's Department
- The Chair of the Connexional Finance Committee
- The Chair of the Church Development Board
- The Secretary of the Conference shall act as Secretary and Convener of the Connexional Team.

7.50

The Connexional Team has the following responsibilities:

- (a) To coordinate and align vision and enable its members to exercise their executive responsibilities consistently across the Connexion;
- (b) To help enable the Connexion to maintain its Methodist ethos and links to its historic Methodist roots;
- (c) To support and resource local Circuits and Societies;
- (d) To allocate the District Home Mission budget among the Districts, for use on the District as determined by the District Superintendent in consultation with the officers of the Home Mission Department;
- (e) To facilitate regular listening opportunities across the Connexion which enable members of the Methodist community to share their joys, concerns, feelings and ideas concerning the church and world;

- (f) To support and assist its members in their individual responsibilities overseeing the various aspects of the Connexion;
- (g) Through its stationing subgroup, to recommend to the Ministerial Session of Conference the stations of ministers and probationers for the ensuing year;
- (h) If required under subparagraph 10.16 (a), below, to appoint annually a District Lay Leader, on the nomination of the District Superintendent;
- (i) To hear and decide appeals from Circuit Executives or Circuit Superintendents regarding decisions made by District Superintendents which impact them;
- (j) To report through the General Committee to Conference.

Appendix C:

The District Lay Leader

(working document verbally shared with General Committee January 2019)

The District Lay Leader is nominated for a one-year term. Her/his primary role is to support the District Superintendent in whatever way they can within the district. More specifically the Lay Leader will be active in the following areas.

Representative role – to represent MCI at community and church events.

Mission role – to discuss and share with the District Superintendent in his/her conversations about mission and discipleship with circuits and local societies

Consultative role – to work with the DS in dealing with district issues and strategy

Worship role – to lead worship and preach (if a local preacher) on available Sundays to encourage and inspire societies in their mission and discipleship

Prophetic role – to raise issues with the DS and suggest new ways of being Methodist and sharing the good news



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