

1. THE OVERALL VISION FOR THE CONNEXIONS PROCESS

The Connexions Report, accepted by Conference (2002), presented the vision of every Church 'existing to glorify God in worship and witness' in ways that are fresh, relevant and faithful to our calling.

Connexions is the process by which we seek to be enriched by God's Spirit and together develop the worship and witness of the Church, at both local, district and national levels.

***The Church is all the people of God.
Worship should warm the hearts and renew the minds of worshippers.
Witness includes evangelism, service, justice and stewardship of the world.***

During the last four years, the Steering Groups that have been appointed by the Conference have sought to provide support and guidance as Churches develop this vision in their own settings.

Many changes have been taking place. The most obvious of these has been in the leadership and structures of Irish Methodism.

1.1. Overview

Some of the new structures for governance of the Church are already in place. Church Councils and Circuit Executives are now part of 'the way we are'. Other recommendations of the 2002 Report are yet to be developed and implemented, but it is felt that this Folder could draw together the different strands of the structural and legislative side of the process which is already in place for local Churches.

As further developments take place and new resources take shape, additional material will be added for use throughout the Church.

Since 2004, Circuits have been adopting this new style of leadership through the introduction of local Church Councils and Circuit Executives. For some it has been difficult, especially where office has been held for many years by people who have given sterling service to their circuits. Most of those making the changes have found them to be both liberating and renewing. Local Church Councils particularly are facing challenges that were not unknown to the Churches of the New Testament era! – asking questions like, 'In what ways can we discover deeper love for one another?' and 'What steps are necessary to uncover and use the gifts God has given everyone?'

The establishment of small Church Councils has meant the introduction of a system of leadership that is different from that often found in the larger Leaders' Meetings of the past. Instead of a 'parliamentary' style of governance where each interest group had representatives to uphold their needs and views, the Church Council is a co-ordinating body to enable each grouping in the Church to undertake its work effectively and in co-operation with others.

Ensuring adequate communication within and beyond the Church is also a responsibility of the Church Council and Circuit Executive.

2. CHURCH COUNCILS & OFFICERS

2.1. *Why change?*

By reducing the numbers of people actually involved in overseeing the local Church, we achieve several things:

- This lighter structure means everyone should know who is responsible for what job, and you and they know what they are expected to do!
- It challenges people to service, and uses their gifts. Those who are not leaders can concentrate on doing well the jobs they are gifted to do: visiting, youth, worship, community work, administration etc.
- Leaders are there to help people do their tasks, not to do the tasks themselves
- Leaders know that they do not have to serve for more than three years so may 'put more into it', and may be less daunted by taking office.
- Not having a large number on the Leaders' Meeting (some had 50 or 60) means there will be people available for election each year. Each one can bring 'freshness'.
- As people join task groups to do jobs in the church, their confidence increases and new Council members begin to emerge, and present Council members get to move on to other ministries!
- It frees folk to serve in their sphere of interest instead of demanding that they also lead.
- It hands ownership of the Church to the Church!
- It allows ordained people to fulfil their calling better, by lessening some responsibilities, including much administration.
- It increases fellowship as people get to know one another in different roles

2.2. Job Descriptions for Church Council Officers

Society Steward

Appointed for a three year period

To be the official lay representative of the Society

- Represent the Church at civic or inter-Church functions or events.
- Be one of the two representatives from your Society on the Circuit Executive
- Promote the worship and witness of your Church in the local community.

To be a member of the Church Council

- Attend regular Church Council meetings.
- Carry out the responsibilities and duties of the Church Council as led down in the Manual of Laws. *(2005 Minutes of Conference, pp 34-36 or Connexions 'HOW TO...' Folder pp24-28.)*
- Be available to attend Working/Task Groups as appropriate.
- Have an overview of all that is happening in the different Task Groups.
- Help each Task Group to have a perspective on the others.
- Be part of the minister's Advisory Group to nominate members for election to the Church Council.

To ensure all necessary arrangements are in order for the worship services, on Sundays and at special occasions. *(You will probably share many of these tasks with others.)*

- Ensure all arrangements are in place for welcoming the congregation at Sunday services. *(For example by liaising with the person responsible for organising the Welcome Stewards.)*
- Ensure stewarding for special services is in place.
- Ensure arrangements have been made for lifting the offering at Sunday and special services.
- Ensure that music leaders and organists charged with contributing to the praise are advised about the practices that are appropriate in your congregation.
- Ensure arrangements are in place for Baptisms and the Lord's Supper. *(For example by liaising with the Communion Steward).*
- Receive announcements and make the announcements during the service. . Accompany and pray with the minister, local preacher or guest speaker in the vestry prior to the service.

To support and encourage the minister and congregation in the development of the work of God

- Be available to work with the ordained and lay leaders in moving forward and prayerfully promoting the mission of Christ for your local Church.
- Encourage the minister to take a sabbatical when appropriate.
- Encourage and support the minister to participate in the Accompanied Self-Appraisal Scheme.
- Nurture new and potential leaders.
- Encourage the congregation to speak well of one another and the minister.
- Be sensitive to anxieties and issues within the congregation and assess if these need to be passed onto the minister or Church Council.

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Property Steward

Appointed for a three year period

To convene and oversee the Property Task Group in your Church (*this group will help you to carry out all the aspects of your job description*)

- Encourage nurture and prayerfully support the other members of this Property Group to view yourselves as the 'doorkeepers in the House of the Lord.'
- Attend regular Church Council meetings and report to it on behalf of the Property Task Group.
- Be aware of how the mission of your Church is reflected in the buildings.

To be responsible for the Church premises

- Arrange the lighting, heating, and cleaning of Church premises, including employment of a cleaner/caretaker.
- Arrange the opening, closing and security of the Church premises.
- Arrange for the proper maintenance of Church premises.
- Oversee all use of Church premises and letting if appropriate.
- Liaise, via the Circuit Executive, with the District Home Mission Committee and District Property Board regarding any structural alteration or sale, if appropriate.
- Prepare relevant reports for the visiting Commission every five years.

To cooperate with the Circuit Manse Steward on matters relating to any manse attached to your Society

- Be aware of the current Manse regulations. (*Manual of Laws and updates in 2005 Minutes of Conference, from page 119.*)
- Liaise with the Circuit Manse Steward who has responsibility for all manses on the Circuit.
- Serve on the Circuit Manse Group if requested.

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Manse Steward

To report to the Circuit Executives it has the responsibility for all manses on your Circuit

- Convene and lead a Circuit Manse Group to oversee the manses and help you carry out all the aspects of your job description. (*Some of the Society Property Stewards may serve on this.*)
- Attend regular Circuit Executive meetings and report on behalf of the Circuit Manse Group.
- Keep up to date with Manse regulations and ensure that they are correctly followed. (*Manual of Laws and updates in 2005 Minutes of Conference, from page 119.*)

To be responsible for the proper maintenance of manse properties on your Circuit

- Arrange and accompany the annual inspection of manse property.
- Ensure that manses are kept structurally sound and well decorated, by organising ongoing maintenance under the authority of the Circuit Executive.

- Prepare and submit grant applications via the District Home Mission Secretary for financial help in repairing, refurbishing or purchasing manses, if necessary.

To assist an outgoing minister in preparing the manse for a new minister's family

- Ensure that the Conference-approved check-list of manse furniture and accommodation requirements is followed. (*Obtained from the Home Mission Department.*)

To be responsible for any vacant manses on your Circuit

- Liaise with the Property Board of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
- Follow the rules for the letting of manses. (*2005 Minutes of Conference, page 200.*)

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Circuit Steward

Appointed for a three year period

To provide support to the Superintendent of the Circuit

- Be the official lay representative of the Circuit at civic and other appropriate occasions.
- Advise the Superintendent and take a pastoral and prayerful interest in his/her work, life and, where appropriate, family.
- Encourage the Superintendent to be involved in the Accompanied Self-Appraisal Scheme, enquire how it is going and encourage positive developments.
- Encourage the Superintendent to take a Sabbatical when appropriate.

To be a member of the Circuit Executive

- Attend regular Circuit Executive meetings.
- Carry out the responsibilities and duties of the Circuit Executive as led down in the Manual of Laws. (*2005 Minutes of Conference, pp 34-36.*)
- Represent the Circuit at the District Synod.

To support the ministers, their families and the Society Stewards on the Circuit

- Pray for the ministers on the Circuit and their families.
- Attend events and services in the different Societies on the Circuit.
- Have an overview of the atmosphere, the people and the worship in the different Societies on the Circuit.
- Use this overview to advise and guide discussion at Circuit Executives and Circuit Meetings.

To consult with the District Stationer on the appointment of a minister to the Circuit

- Be sensitive and prayerful in your consultations with the District Stationer and the other members of the group set up by the Circuit Executive to discuss a change of minister.
- Use your knowledge of the Circuit to advise this group.
- Assist in planning a briefing for the incoming minister once the final Stationing list is published in February.
- Make a request for an extension of a minister's service beyond eight years, if appropriate, as per the procedures led down in the Manual of Laws. (*Manual of Laws, chapter 4, paragraph 32.*)

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Church Treasurer

Appointed for a three year period

To be responsible to the Church Council for all financial income, for its proper use or transmission, as directed

- Receive and account for the offerings at Sunday services, and other services where appropriate.
- Pay bills, such as light, heat, insurance, and general running expenses.
- Make your Church's contribution, at least quarterly via the Circuit Treasurer, to Circuit expenses such as: ministers' stipend and allowances; the agreed contribution to the Comprehensive Assessment; and contributions to Connexional funds, such as Child Care, or World Development.
- When necessary submit grant applications via the Circuit Executive, e.g. to the Home Mission Department.
- Liaise closely with the Circuit Manse Steward to ensure your Society's manse is refurbished and maintained to the standard set by Conference.
- Ensure all the Church organisations submit their accounts to you for annual audit.
- Maintain accurate Church Accounts, along with Trust and Investment Accounts when appropriate, and submit these for annual audit.

To convene and oversee the Finance Task Group in your Church

- Oversee and support the work of other members of this Finance Group, such as the Gift Aid and Freewill Offering Secretaries.
- Report financial recommendations and other decisions of the Finance Group to the Church Council.

As the Finance Group, together you will do the following-

- Agree financial recommendations to ensure the smooth running of your Church.
- Plan and prepare an annual budget for the Church, where appropriate
- Prepare grant applications for approval by the Circuit Executive.
- Contribute to the growth in discipleship of members of the congregation by helping them to understand that offering our money is part of our offering of ourselves to God.
- Ensure that the congregation is kept informed of financial decisions and recommendations on a regular basis; so they can understand that their contributions are crucial to God's work through the Church.
- Work to cultivate and encourage the Biblical principle of tithing among the congregation.

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Circuit Treasurer

Appointed for a three year period

To be responsible to the Circuit Executive for all financial income, for its proper use or transmission

- Receive contributions from Societies towards: ministers' stipends and allowances; the agreed contribution to the Comprehensive Assessment; and contributions to Connexional funds, such as Child Care and World Development.
- Pay to the Trustees Office monies required for the payment of stipends and other commitments.
- Transmit Circuit contributions to the Comprehensive Assessment and Connexional funds.
- Liaise with the Manse Steward and pay rent, rates and other agreed maintenance expenses of ministers' residences.
- Keep accurate accounts and submit these for annual audit.

To be a member of the Circuit Executive

- Attend regular Circuit Executive meetings and report on the Circuit's financial situation as appropriate.
- Carry out the responsibilities and duties of the Circuit Executive as led down in the Manual of Laws. (*2005 Minutes of Conference, pp 34-36.*)

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Church Council Secretary

Appointed for a three year period

To ensure that meetings of the Church Council are properly called

- Issue notices of meetings in writing and separate from Minutes which may be circulated at the same time.
- Try to ensure that members receive their written notice at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
- If yours is a small congregation where everyone forms the Church Council, you can give the notice by a pulpit announcement at least a week in advance.

To prepare the agenda for meetings of the Church Council

- Liaise with the Chairperson who will usually be the minister but from time to time may be another Church Council member appointed by the minister.
- Receive regular written reports from the Task Groups.
- Copy these written reports to members of the Church Council prior to the meeting, when appropriate. *(Reports from Task Groups do not need to be received at every meeting.)*
- When appropriate invite people who have been requested to make a report about specific tasks to which they were appointed. *(These might include Pastoral Visitors, Youth Workers, Home, Overseas or MWI Secretaries.)*

To minute the proceedings of the Church Council

- Record only the decisions made by the Church Council and include any significant points the members feel are essential to the minute, but not a word by word account.
- Keep records in a Minute Book for future reference.
- Ensure minutes are agreed by the Church Council and signed by the Chairperson.

To manage correspondence

- To receive correspondence on behalf of the Church Council.
- To correspond on behalf of the Church Council as directed
- In consultation with the minister to receive correspondence from different Connexional departments and bring it to the attention of the Church Council.
- Liaise and cooperate with those in the congregation who already receive information from Various Connexional departments to ensure information and business is brought to the attention of the Church Council.

To act as Secretary of the Congregational Meeting

- Record main points made in the review of the previous year and the suggestions made for future worship and witness.
- Record names of those elected to the Church Council.
- Record the ratification of the officials nominated by the minister.

To assist in good communication between the Church Council and the congregation

- Encourage the Church Council to inform the congregation regularly of any decisions made.
- Assist in the sharing of this information.
- Note questions or comments made by members of the congregation during Congregational Meetings and when Church Council decisions are being shared, and ensure they are brought to the attention of the Church Council.

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be others you wish to add.

Circuit Secretary

Appointed for a three year period

To arrange meetings of the Circuit Executive

- Liaise with the Circuit Superintendent and prepare the agenda for meetings.
- Issue notices of meetings in writing in good time.
- Record only the decisions made and any significant points raised during the proceedings; have these minutes agreed and ensure the minutes are signed by the Circuit Superintendent.

To arrange meetings of the Circuit Meeting

- Liaise with the Circuit Superintendent and prepare the agenda for meetings.
- Record the main points made in the discussion of the work of God on the Circuit.

To manage correspondence for the Circuit

- Receive correspondence on behalf of the Circuit Executive. . To correspond on behalf of the Circuit Executive as directed.

Please note that these responsibilities may need to be adapted to suit your local situation and that there may be

2.3. President's Letters to Office Holders

During his year as President of the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI), Rev Des Bain, who had been the Connexions Facilitator, wrote personal letters to people participating in the new circuit structures. They are reprinted here as helpful guidelines (hopefully!) rather than policy statements, and the job descriptions at 2.2 incorporate the points.



Letter to a Church Council Secretary

Dear Pat,

I was delighted to hear that you have agreed to become the Secretary of the Church Council for the next three years. This is a key job and an efficient secretary, such as I believe you will be, can not only keep the Council running smoothly, but can also help to ensure that Church members are kept up to date with what is happening locally and nationally.

CALLING MEETINGS

Your first task is to ensure that meetings of the Church Council are properly called. The regulation (2005 Minutes of Conference, page 37) says this is to be done in writing and in good time. Not everyone may be carrying a diary when the date of the next meeting is set, nor may memory serve, so try to ensure that members receive their written notice at least two weeks in prior of the meeting, and on a separate piece of paper from any Minutes you may circulate. (In small congregations, where everyone forms the Council, the notice can be by pulpit announcement at least a week in advance.)

AGENDAS

Along with the Chairperson, you will help to prepare the agenda for the Council. The Chair will usually be the minister, but from time to time another Council member, appointed by the minister, may preside. I'm sure you will realise that reports from all the Working Parties do not need to be received at every meeting, but it is crucial that each group prepares a regular written report, which will need to be copied to all the members, beforehand if possible. That's your responsibility.

On other occasions, people who have been appointed to do particular tasks may be invited to attend in order to make a report. These might include, for example, Pastoral Visitors, Youth Workers, Home, Overseas or MWI Secretaries.

A BIT MORE

All the areas of oversight which need to be considered during the year are listed in Paragraph 10.06 of the Manual of Laws (See Section 4). Among these is the role of the Society within the Circuit and the Connexion (the whole Methodist Church in Ireland), including Connexional activities, publications and funds. This is where you could be invited to expand your role somewhat! Here's how -

Ministers receive a lot of correspondence from the different Connexional departments. These can be requests for information, invitations to do something special in your own Church – such as celebrate a particular Sunday in the Church's year, literature for appeals, or notices about special events. It seems to me to be an idea that, if desired, this information could be copied to the Council Secretary so that you take responsibility for bringing it to the attention of the Council for appropriate action. Of course, many Churches already have people who act as contact persons

for the various Connexional bodies and they need to be able to co-operate with you in order to get their business to the Council. Make sure you know who they are, so that you can keep one another on the ball! Many will have been members of the Leaders' Meeting, but some have not been, like Prayer Focus Contact people.

THE MINUTES

You won't need to record a 'blow by blow' account of meetings. (though I trust there won't be any blows!). Usually, it is sufficient to record only the decisions the Council makes, and add whatever significant points the members feel are essential to minute. A Minute Book is vital so that a clear record of decisions is signed by the Chair and kept for future reference.

KEEP COMMUNICATING

An important task relating to Councils (Manual of Laws, para 10.06 (k) – see Section 4) is that of ensuring good communication between the Council and the Congregation. This is one of the weakest points of any Church's life. However, in one Society the Council has formed the practice of taking 10 minutes, in or after the Service on the following Sunday to put its decisions unto a flip chart or PowerPoint, and informing everyone of what is happening. A good secretary can encourage this and be on hand to note questions or comments made by members of the congregation. Allowing this to happen during the worship enables everyone to realise that they are involved together in the work of God, and have opportunity to pray for the past and future as the gathered Body of Christ. It makes the usual 'announcements' an act of ministry.

Pat, you will also act as Secretary to the Congregational meeting as well. One of these should be held at least once a year, with the main purpose of reviewing the present and bringing inspiration for the future. The Congregational Meeting has only two items of official business: to elect a limited number of members to the Council and to ratify the four local officials on the nomination of the Minister.

Pat, you can see that this is quite a busy role in ongoing worship and witness of your Church. I trust you find it rewarding and I want to wish you well in it. You will have plenty of opportunities to use your administrative skills to the full and encourage others to find and develop the gifts God has given them.

So as I ask that the Lord will bless you in his service, I also want to say a sincere thank-you for your commitment to the life of the Church.



Letter to a Society Steward

Dear Alan,

Yours is much-changed role! Up until now, Society (and Circuit) Stewards often had to juggle to look after property and money as well as offering spiritual support to the minister! It was not unknown for a Steward to rush from attending to the heating boiler, to praying with the preacher, and then after the service counting and lodging the offering. These multiple tasks, carried out for many years must have frustrated many, and I suspect had a detrimental effect on health, and even, on occasion, family life. Yet most Stewards brought great grace and made huge commitments of time and energy to safeguard and advance the welfare of the local Church. We are forever in their debt.

The new Church Council structure provides the opportunity to divide these responsibilities and involve more people in using their gifts and skills. The appointment of local treasurers and

property stewards, means that you can concentrate on representing your local Church and especially on promoting its worship and witness.

A REPRESENTATIVE

For the three years you hold office, (all leaders are appointed for a three year period), you are the official lay representative of the congregation. At the very least, this means being available to work with the ordained and lay leaders in moving forward the mission of Christ for your Church. There may be occasions when you will be asked to represent the Church at a civic or inter-Church function. Don't be intimidated, or allow others to think that only 'the minister' is qualified to do that! Ministry is for all God's people and perhaps one of the distinctive contributions Methodism has to make to our brothers and sisters of other Churches and indeed the community, is showing that lay and ordained are called and equipped by God for service and leadership together.

ON THE CHURCH COUNCIL

Conference produced an outline of the business each Council should undertake (2005 Minutes of Conference, pp 34-36). It cannot all be done at one meeting! As this agenda is broken up into bite-sized chunks, I am sure that your help in working through the details will be vital. Task groups will be formed to undertake particular responsibilities, like worship, youth, community or pastoral work. Every Council member will be a member of at least one of these groups and act as the liaison person, helping the Council to co-ordinate all the work. However, as Society Steward, you will need an overview of all that is happening and it will be helpful if you attend some of the meetings of each group, especially in the early stages. You will be able to give each group a perspective on the others – acting as a kind of glue for the Church!

By the way Alan, there is another role too! You will be one of two people who represent your Church on the Circuit Executive. This is the replacement for the Quarterly Meeting. The Executive co-ordinates the work of the circuit and looks after things like: manses (a job for which there is a separate steward and team), appointing representatives to Synod and Conference; and controlling the Circuit budget.

SUNDAYS

Sunday is a day with particular duties. The practical arrangements for Worship may often fall back on you. Many of these you will need to share out to others. In fact, they may already be done by others anyway: - the welcome of the congregation; you will need to make sure stewarding for special services is in place and ensure there are folk to receive the offering; check that the music leaders/organists or others charged with contributing to the praise are advised about the practices

that are appropriate in the congregation; and check that arrangements are in place for the Lord's Supper and Baptisms.

Announcements may also be one of your tasks. This is an important area where your ministry can greatly enable the person leading worship. Receiving late announcements and actually making the announcements during the service, can be quite a distraction for a minister or Local Preacher. Having another person who knows the congregation to do these is a big help. Also, it may be that a change of voice actually helps people hear the notice!

Many Stewards do not realise the impact they have on an act of worship by praying with the leader or leaders of the service before they enter the sanctuary. Long or flowery prayers are not necessary! A short and sincere prayer, read or extemporary, enormously focuses the mind and spirit of the leader. It encourages them to know they are part of the Body of Christ in this place.

YOU AND THE MINISTER

Every congregation has its little, or larger, problems. Obviously ministers have to honour confidentiality. There are many ways you can join in the ministry of oversight though. Stamp on criticism and don't pass on gossip (nobody should). Instead, encourage people to think and speak well of one another and the minister. Of course you will hear murmurings and it's up to you to assess if the anxieties or issues are real and need to be shared with the minister or Council. I know you will do this sensitively. Most ministers are wise enough to know they need advice from time to time, and your genuine concern for situations or people, gently but firmly made to the minister, can be a great help.

FINAL WORDS

Since yours is a large congregation, you will be relieved that you only have to serve for three years! If the Council thinks it helpful, a deputy Steward or Stewards could be appointed to assist you. Their brief needs to be clearly understood and the Council needs to decide who should be designated as your successor.

You will also be expected to be part of a small team to nominate members for election to the Church Council. For this, as for all the jobs you will do, you will be dependent on praying through the things you might already think! The prayerful promotion of your Church's mission statement and nurturing of new leaders, is the most important of all the jobs any Society Steward will do. I pray God's blessing on you and know that the fellowship of the Church will be richer for the service you render.



Letter to a Church Treasurer (and others on Finance Groups)

Dear Lesley,

I thought that coming towards the end of the year, it might be appropriate to write to Church Treasurers! It is a very busy time for you as you ensure that all the organisations get their accounts to you soon, so that you can prepare the Church/or Circuit Accounts for audit. You need to make sure also that the monies collected for Church Departments, like MMS(I), have been sent and, on top of all that, you will be thinking about next year's budgets.

We have all heard the comment, 'The Church is always looking for money'. Some people seem to believe that the Church should exist on air and their words could make you feel almost guilty for doing your job! It is a principle of Methodism that every circuit takes responsibility for the

maintenance of its ministers and their expenses. When proved necessary, grants can be sought from the Home Mission Department, and about 30% of circuits receive some such help.

THE WORK YOU DO

The backbone of your work is the reception of, and accounting for, Sunday offerings. From these you pay certain bills, like light, insurance, running expenses. This routine work can be quite onerous, especially in a small Church where there are few volunteers to help.

As well as paying the bills, you then make your particular Church's contribution to circuit expenses, such as ministers' stipend and allowances; the agreed contribution to the Comprehensive Assessment; and send on the special offerings or allocations to different funds like Child Care or World Development etc.

Each Circuit Executive (Quarterly Meeting) will also have a Manse Steward, with whom you will need to work closely to make sure the manse is refurbished and maintained to the standard set by Conference. By the way, when a circuit needs a bank loan order to undertake a project, it is necessary to obtain the permission of the Trustees through an application to the Property Board.

FOR WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED

By now your Church Council should have established a 'Finance Group'. This small team is to assist you in your work and agree financial recommendations to come to the Church Council for approval. (Applications for grants need to go on to the Circuit Executive.) It is likely that you are the convenor of this small working party and its remit should be about more than pure accounts. You have a unique opportunity to contribute to the growth in discipleship of members of the congregation.

For example, many people feel that their only active participation in worship, and therefore their only involvement in the life of the Church, is that they put money on the plate. No one even thanks them, as it is dedicated to God! I wish we would stop calling it 'the collection'. It is part of our offering of ourselves to God, and there are more ways of doing this than handing a plate around! The custom introduced by some of our new members from African countries, involves families placing their offerings into plates at the front of the church, during the singing of several songs. That makes it quite a 'giving event'!

PASS IT ON

I am sure that members should be kept informed on a regular basis, so that they can understand that their contributions are crucial to God's work through the Church. The general interest and involvement of some people might just increase! This is the Finance Group's job. What about letting the congregation know how much is set aside for nurturing children's and youth ministry? We talk (wrongly in my view) about young people being the Church of tomorrow, but we show our commitment by our investment in them today.

TITHING SHOULD BE STANDARD

Congregations do need to hear that neither you nor the minister, are the people who require the money! Several years ago the Conference stipulated that tithing, the Biblical principle of giving the first tenth of our wealth to God, should be encouraged in all our Churches. How this might be cultivated could also be part of the Finance Group's brief! We tend to be afraid to draw attention to this Biblical command because we think it is too sensitive a matter and might put people off the Church. But if only ten families, on an average income, contributed their whole tithe to the local Church then that would pay the minister's stipend! It has been well said that tithing is not the

Church's way of raising money, it is God's way of raising his children. I once heard a tithing testimony, by a woman who said that from their wedding day, she and her husband pledged one tenth of their income to God's work. They had not become rich, but they were never in need, because giving firstly to God, made all other priorities fall into place.

THANK YOU

Few people appreciate the Trojan work you undertake often with little recognition, as you ensure the smooth running of the Church's financial needs and gifts. It can be quite a headache and I want you to know that your attention to these details is much needed by those who know little of the work, and much appreciated by those of us who do!

Today many Churches have Gift Aid and Envelope Secretaries who have separate tasks that need to be undertaken accurately. Both need to work closely together and stay in touch. To keep anonymity most Churches organise the envelope system by numbers, so comparing details does not break the confidentiality of people's contributions. Where there are folk who undertake these roles, it eases your job a lot and, with you, they too deserve our best thanks.

Enjoy Christmas, Lesley! However, I suspect that like many Church treasurers you will be hoping to find some space to prepare the accounts for the Synod Auditor who has to complete his or her work before the end of February so that accounts are ready for grant applications, and assessment.

With every good wish and renewed thanks to God for the time and skill you bring to your role as Treasurer.



Letter to a Task Group Member

Dear Jo,

It is good to know that your Church Council is on the ball by setting up some Task Groups to take responsibility for different areas of its work. Since you are not actually member of the Council but have been asked to serve on one of them, it may all be a bit of a mystery to you!

Amongst the structural changes introduced by the Connexions process, is that of inviting people to use their gifts and skills in the whole life of the Church. In the past we tended to leave everything to the Leaders' Meeting, which occasionally appointed sub-committees to do some tasks, and often the sub committee continued long after its original work was done! By definition, a sub committee consisted of Leaders who were then simply overburdened with extra work, and some of members felt ill-equipped to do it. At the same time a host of willing, but unused, helpers were unwittingly distanced from the work of the Church.

Our new Councils are smaller than Leaders' Meetings and are charged with facilitating the mission of the local Church. The first step they take is to arrange for the congregation to develop its own Mission Statement. This gives overall direction to the Church, and each year realistic aims, towards its fulfilment, should be set in all areas. Task Groups can be set up to help achieve these aims in worship and witness; in helping to provide support for the Church community and take care of practical matters. Where necessary, a Task Group can be given power to act on behalf of the Council, so long as the parameters are clearly specified.

At this stage, rather than try to define in detail what different Task Groups might do, I thought it might be useful to share some personal thoughts which I think hold good for any team and then mention one or two practical points about their operation.

A CLEAR AIM

The aim of any Task Group is to help the Church to do its work – the mission of God! Isn't it hard sometimes to remember that we are stewards of Christ's church, not the owners? Every Church should be searching to discern what God is calling it to be and do in its community. This calling should permeate every organisation and project. The responsibility of a Task Group is to further the particular mission God has given, through worship, social life, prayer, community outreach, interest in the world Church, youth, children, property, finance, and pastoral ministry. There are ten Groups already! Not every Church needs all of them, and of course some can be combined. It is up to each Council to decide which are necessary, but for each Group the first question is 'What goals are to be achieved this year?' Groups that are mission-focussed will meet as often as necessary to do their work, and not to fulfil an appointment in the calendar.

BUILD A TEAM

Whether your Task Group is to enhance worship and witness or develop and support the Church community, take time to team-build. It's essential. Teamwork does not develop merely because people have the Church in common, it comes when we deliberately choose to welcome the ministries God has given to others, even if we don't hit it off personally. The team is not there to follow the Chairperson or Convenor's personal agenda, but to allow God to lead through the mixture of people he loves and has brought together. So take some time to get to know one another a little better. There are likely to be one or two new members on the team every year, so provide opportunity for them to say what their particular interests are and to listen to what the others feel called to be and do. This will help each person to find his or her place.

LOOK OUT FOR NEW THINGS

Often this will mean exploring an unusual suggestion or one that doesn't seem to 'fit' immediately! Sometimes the simplest or most outrageous idea is the one that becomes a key to unlock a blockage in the Church. We need to make our contributions in an attitude of submission. God rarely gives one person the whole picture! He has created us to work in community so expect that others will have other pieces of the jigsaw or will be able to see the picture from a different angle.

Up to the present time, sub-committees have often been for property and finance. It is natural that we have always looked for people with particular skills to serve on them. By all means use the abilities people have, but it may worth asking if the bankers or builders always want to serve on finance and property, or teachers in the Sunday School! They may feel they should explore other gifts they've been given. A builder on the Worship Task Group might bring interesting insights.

WHERE DOES THE MINISTER FIT IN?

Certainly not as Chair or Convenor of all the Task Groups! Part of the idea of this new way of doing things is to release the minister from some administration to do what she or he is called to do, namely, to watch over the flock of Christ by exercising a preaching and pastoral ministry. Of course ministers will be consulted and advice sought, but their role is more about the patient and humble sharing of vision, and being members of the team that makes it come true.

Each Task Group will have someone on it from the Church Council. This person is not meant to be the Convenor or Chair, but has the role of making sure clear communication takes place between the Council and the Group, by presenting agreed written reports to Council. Doing this ensures that the Group is being heard and the Council knows what resources it needs. Good communication also helps plan the Church calendar and enhances proper teamwork throughout the Church.

Jo, I really hope this helps to clarify something of what Task Groups are about. They are the means of putting the Church into the hands of the People of God, realising that we have much to learn as we work together. In the unity of common purpose we will find that the Spirit of God is quietly at work accomplishing far more than we thought was his will!



Letter to an elected member of a Church Council

Dear Mary,

CONGRATULATIONS! I hear you have been elected to the new Church Council.

At this stage you are probably wondering what you have let yourself in for! Church Councils are the new way of managing local Methodist Churches, and they are different from the Leaders'

Meetings that they replace. The Minutes of Conference 2005 (pages 33-44), is the best place to find out all the details, but I thought it might be helpful to mention some points!

WHAT'S THE JOB?

One minister summed up the aim of the Church Council like this, 'It is not about doing the business of the church, but helping the Church do its business!' ConneXions described that business as 'bringing glory to God through worship and witness'. Your job, along with the others on your Church Council is to develop the worship and witness of your Church so that the 'boss (God) looks good' in the eyes of the world! That's what it means to glorify Him.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

If your Church has not already got a succinct Mission Statement, then the first job for the Council is to arrange to produce one. Everything the Council does in governing the local Church depends on this Statement, so it is important to involve as many people as possible in creating it. The Home Mission/Connexions Group can provide guidelines and personnel to draw the whole congregation into discerning what it is that God is inviting your Church to be and do.

Once your motto (Mission Statement) is in place, the Council then prepares plans to implement it. This means: a) setting annual goals that are simple and achievable, like deciding fresh and practical steps for welcoming visitors and b) setting long term goals, like evangelising the town or building a new hall, and setting the project in motion. But perhaps the biggest job of all is making sure that good lines of communication keep everyone in the congregation both informed and inspired!

An Annual Congregational Meeting is meant to do this by helping everyone celebrate what God has been doing the year just past, and also mapping out next year's aims. Let's admit it – just about every Church has communications problems, so it might be a good idea for the Council appoint a member to report briefly to the congregation the Sunday after a Council Meeting. Use your Church magazine for receiving feedback from the congregation. When people are not informed or involved they tend to drift and their gifts are lost to God's service.

WHAT WILL YOU ACTUALLY HAVE TO DO?

I know, Mary, that you have a fervour for Christian witness in word and action. So don't be surprised if the Council sets up a Witness Group and invites you to act as the 'liaison person'. If it sets up any group, the Council must agree the terms of reference and receive regular written reports. You aren't expected to do the work, so be careful you don't take over! Your job is to encourage the team and bring its reports to the Council.

Of course on occasion, another team member could come along to share in the conversations of the Council. The team members will be interested and gifted members of the congregation.

Your colleagues on the Council will work with similar teams. One should be established for worship; another could be for pastoral work (Class Leaders?); others for children's and youth

work; administration and property; and some folk will need to identify and resource training needs. Other areas will be obvious to the Council. But I hope you get the idea – that the Church's business is done by members of the congregation, some of whom may never have been asked to participate before. One Church I heard about recently has almost everyone in the congregation involved in at least one task or mission group developing worship and witness. Council members, like yourself are there to facilitate and encourage, and preferably not chair the meetings. Whatever

groups you have, please make sure the Council provides clear guidelines and the authority to do the job. Of course, once its work is done the group or team should be disbanded!

By the way, do not be surprised if the minister does not chair all the meetings of the Council! The new rules say that the minister, or someone appointed by him /her, chairs meetings of the Council.

FOR HOW LONG WILL YOU SERVE ON THE COUNCIL?

The maximum term on the Council is normally three years. Each year the Congregational Meeting will replace, by election, one third of Council membership. The method for getting this in place from the present Leaders Meeting structure is laid out in the 2005 Minutes of Conference. Incidentally, an idea being floated at the moment would change the term 'elected member' to 'steward'. This might alter the impression that you are a representative to a kind of parliament, rather than a steward of God's Church enabling others to be the People of God in the world.

APART FROM YOU, WHO ELSE IS ON THE COUNCIL?

That depends on the size of your congregation. There can be any multiple of three people, up to eighteen, in addition to the minister and four officials:

- **The Society Steward** – who is the 'official lay representative' of the congregation. She or he will provide support for the minister, and encourage the spiritual development of the congregation. The Society Steward is a first among equals.
- **The Church Council Secretary** - who makes sure the decisions are recorded and meetings are properly called, and my letter to the secretary outlines some other jobs that might usefully be included.
- **The Treasurer** - who, in larger Churches will be part of a Finance committee, and who always reports to the Council. Incidentally, it is a good practice for treasurers, or others, always to have at least one other person present when offerings are counted.
- **The Property Steward.** Just as with other jobs to be done, the Council will appoint a small number of people with relevant skills or interest to work together, for example a Property Group that is responsible to the Council.

In smaller Churches, the Steward may fulfil the role of Secretary but not Treasurer or Property Steward. The last two can be done by the same person, if necessary. All these roles are for a term of three years.

A LAST THOUGHT OR TWO

Mary, perhaps one of your most important tasks will be to spot and encourage people in your congregation to use their God given abilities and to work as the Body of Christ, doing what God needs done. Try to encourage people to see that what they may regard as small abilities, are God's invitations to serve Him with gladness. He places special importance on small things – just look at Jesus' parables about seeds!

And do commit yourself to pray for the unity and work of the Church of Jesus Christ. Trust others to do their part and pray for them too. May God bless you and your fellow Council members as you set out on this challenging and exciting journey. I hope your Church Council meetings will bring much joy and thanksgiving for the things you see the Lord doing.



Letter to a Worship Group Member

Dear Barry,

This is one of the places where the Connexions rubber hits the road, and I know that as one of the Local Preachers on the Worship Task Group, you will thrive on the challenges. Connexions emphasised that the reason for the existence of any Church is, 'To glorify God through Worship and Witness'. From 1999-2002 Ross Harte was Worship Development Officer for MCI. Since the advent of Connexions, we have concentrated on getting Mission Statements to give our witness direction. Now let's put both together!

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE NORMAL AND THE SPECIAL!

There are many special services to be arranged, and this is often the starting place for a Worship Task Group. However, the aim is not to provide constant innovation or only to plan the special services, but to make people's weekly experience of God relevant, heart warming and mind renewing. This involves sharing ideas and allowing time for the congregation to gently test them.

ISN'T IT THE MINISTER'S JOB?

Of course, your minister is ultimately responsible for the ordering of worship, including the decision about who may or may not preach. However, the Conference has long urged us to establish worship committees to encourage lay participation in planning and leading worship. Today new resources (like PowerPoint), and better appreciation of the ways people experience life and God, make it vitally important for fresh expressions of worship to be sensitively explored. This is best done by a group of people working with a mandate given by their Church Council.

A PLEA FOR ROUNDED WORSHIP

Your Worship Task Group, along with the minister, might consider how to respond to questions like, 'How does our worship glorify God?' (To glorify God is to 'draw attention and pay tribute to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'); and 'How would a first time worshipper in our Church sense God's presence?' and 'Is there another step we can take to make worship more helpful?'

It is my view that in recent years there has been a tendency to use 'praise' and 'worship' as if they are interchangeable words! They are not. Praise is one important aspect. Worship moves through adoration (praise), confession and thanksgiving. It must include ministry of the Word, and responses such as offerings, intercessions and dedication. These are the elements essential to the worship Jesus referred to when he spoke of the of 'worship in Spirit and in truth.' John ch 4. Often we introduce change to praise, but shy away from considering the whole Act of Worship.

PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION THAT ENABLES PEOPLE TO WORSHIP

Informality characterises life today, but we need to guard against assuming that informality in worship means intimacy with God! This is a challenge as we prepare worship for others. God is both 'transcendent and immanent'. This means a place for both the awesome reverence of 'Immortal, invisible' and the tenderness of 'Abba Father'.

This year it has been an inspiration for me to share with choirs and praise groups; to be led in readings, prayers and occasional drama, by people who have obviously prepared well. However, ministers know better than most how easy it is to become so informal in, or accustomed to 'doing our part', that we diminish rather than enhance worship of others. I appeal to Worship Groups to arrange learning opportunities and reflection for all who give leadership, whether making announcements, singing, reading, acting or praying. We need to encourage another for the part each plays and stir one another up to good works – in worship as well as life!

AND THE MUSIC!

Barry, this is probably the biggest bone of contention in your Church! Most of us struggle to mix old hymns with new songs. Your task group can make a significant contribution to integrating them. Consider these: 'Why do we sing what we sing?' 'How can hymns/songs be used in our prayers; incorporated into Holy Communion; used to bring our Offerings; in confession; as well as used in praise and thanksgiving?' Do we need to provide more commentary as we lead?

It is probably worth saying that it is not your business to 'tell people what's good for them', but to ask, 'how does our choice, manner and presentation help people to worship God?'

For those who find either the old or the new difficult, it is important to learn together the meaning of 'the sacrifice of praise'. A sacrifice is giving up what we once possessed. So my sacrifice of praise is rejoicing as I watch others offer their praise in a way that is meaningful for them.

LOCAL PREACHERS DEVELOPING WORSHIP

Seeking to develop weekly worship means an increased role for Local Preachers. Previously, you attended the Leaders' Meeting, but worship decisions usually amounted to agreeing dates for harvest etc! There was rarely any study or discussion. Worship Task Groups provide opportunities for Local Preachers to exercise their calling, and to use their gifts and training to better effect. I hope that in every circuit LP's will take up the challenge to innovate and develop ever worship experiences that are appropriate for their communities.

2.4. Questions & Answers

- **What do I do if the minister is not interested in Connexions?**

Pray for wisdom! Having said that, it is important to know that the Conference of 2005 approved the new structures of Church Council and Circuit Executive and they are now the law of the Church. Clear guidelines were printed in the Minutes of Conference as to how the transition could be made from Leaders' Meetings to Church Councils.

As they have adopted this new way of leading the Church, Councils and Circuit Executives are discovering the need to explore some of the items on the original 'menu' – like pastoral care and use of gifts. By being aware of what is available and who to contact, you might wait for the question like, "Where can we get training for Pastoral Visitors?" to be asked in the Church Council.

Also, take opportunities to tell stories that you have heard about how Connexions is helped others. By spreading the word, the time will come!

- **When the decisions of the Circuit Executive are contrary to the wishes of a Church Council, what action can be taken?**

It has always been the case that decisions made by a higher court of the wider Church may not be in keeping with local wishes. Changes in stations is an obvious one. Whilst we always seek to work by consensus in the life of the Church, we do have to recognise that often the greater good can only be seen from outside our own place. The spirit of being a Connexion means that we defer to our brothers and sisters, even when we think they may be making a mistake.

We must not lose the truth that because one group gets its way, that does not mean that God's will is being done, or that it has been thwarted. We know 'that in all things, God works for good with those who love him' (Romans 8:28) Why should a local community of God's people be afraid to practice faith in His Providence?

3. CIRCUIT EXECUTIVE & OFFICERS

3.1. *Why change?*

In the past, every member of every Leaders' Meeting was a member of the Quarterly Meeting. In some circuits this number was in excess of 120 people, and usually only a small proportion of these members actually attended the meetings! Even 30-40 people will find it difficult to discuss and decide on an issue in a short time. Most effective discussion and decision takes place when smaller groups can bring their in-depth thinking to a group that has an overview of all the interests and parties.

Ministers remain key to the life and work of any Circuit, and in order to enable, support and advise, a smaller Circuit Executive can filter the many voices, discern the insights coming from different Societies and individuals and offer support, encouragement and warning.

Another major reason for the change is the opportunity to do at Circuit level what we are doing at Society level, i.e. draw on expertise from a wider group of people to deal with ongoing matters which often took up most time at Quarterly Meetings, - property and finance business. The new structure also enables Church Councils to work more closely in the Circuit, and it will have the effect of prompting better communication on Circuits.

3.2. *Overview*

The legislation (see Section 4) provides for every Circuit to establish its own structures and practices providing that the list of responsibilities lying with the Circuit Executive are undertaken. There are organisations and procedures that operate at Circuit rather than local / Society level, such as Local Preachers.

In order to undertake its business, it is important that a Circuit Executive does not 'do all the work itself'. As with Councils, task groups can be established at Circuit level, drawing on the gifts, personnel and resources of the whole Circuit. This is virtually a 'must' where Ministerial appointments, Lay Employment issues, candidates and major property matters are to be addressed.

3.3. *Job Descriptions for Circuit Officials*

Circuit Steward

- To be the official Lay Representative of the circuit at civic and other appropriate occasions
- To support the ministers and their families
- To negotiate with the District Stationer on the appointment of a minister to the Circuit
- To represent the Circuit at District Synod
- To report to the Circuit Executive

Manse Steward

- To be responsible for the proper maintenance of manse properties

- To arrange and accompany the annual inspection of manse property
- To report to the Circuit Executive

Circuit Treasurer

- To receive contributions from Societies towards stipends, Comprehensive Assessment and Connexional funds
- To pay to the Trustees Office monies required for the payment of stipends and other commitments
- To transmit Circuit contributions to the Comprehensive Assessment and Connexional funds
- To pay rent and rates and other agreed maintenance expenses of ministers residences
- To keep accurate accounts and submit these for annual audit
- To report to the Circuit Executive

Circuit Secretary

- To prepare the Agenda of meetings of the Circuit Executive and Circuit Meeting in conjunction with the Circuit Superintendent
- To issue notices of meetings in writing in good time
- To record the proceedings and have the minutes agreed
- To receive correspondence on behalf of the Circuit Executive and correspond on its behalf as directed

3.4. **President's Letters to Office Holders**



Letter to a Minister

Dear Me!

Of all the letters I've written during the year, this is the most risky! However, in the light of the renewal of worship and witness which it is hoped the Connexions process will bring, it seems appropriate to put down a few thoughts, some with which you may disagree!

I candidated for the ministry with idea that the aim of ministry was to 'keep the Church going'. In the 1960's everything seemed to revolve around that singularly clear task. It soon dawned on me that ministry involved more than preaching on Sunday, taking a Bible Study and visiting the congregation. There was service in the wider Connexion; representing the Church in community and social affairs; working for justice with others; ecumenical co-operation, as well as chaplaincy and educational work. It is small wonder ordained ministers feel pulled in different directions and find it hard to fulfil their obligations to hosts of people. No one mentioned, either, that as Christians, we can have an ungodly tendency to be difficult to work with!

MY HOBBYHORSE

Let me put this one on the table before saying anything about our place in the new structures at local level! As ministers, the Conference appoints us to circuit. For about one third of ministers that means working in one particular Church, although there may be other Churches and ministers on the circuit. However, you and I are never the ministers of any one Church. We are ministers of one Methodist Church in Ireland, sent to serve in a circuit of Societies for a period of time.

There are two issues here. One is that each minister has responsibility beyond the local Circuit to the Connexion where we offer support to every congregation through youth work, Social Responsibility, Home and Overseas Missions, finance and so on. This workload needs to be carefully and well spread. We are indebted to all who play such significant and helpful roles in this way.

The second issue relates to the length of our appointments. In recent years it has been said that seven or eight years in a Church is not long enough to fulfil a vision or enable Church growth. There is hardly one among us who has not had 'my vision' for 'my Church', and tried to introduce resources or programmes that have succeeded elsewhere.

MY VISION?

Offer your visions to the leadership of the Church and wait for it to be changed and owned. How often in the past has a minister been frustrated when Leaders and people do not seem to grasp what it is he or she wants to accomplish?

A strength of having a smaller Church Council is the opportunity to talk through more thoroughly the details and implications of what the Church is to be and where it should go. In the past, we may have been enthused with an idea, found that one or two others thought it good and got the Leaders (at least those who attended) to agree. Then we discovered when we tried to get it going, no one seemed interested! Let's admit it – chairing a meeting provides opportunity to sell your idea. When you seem keen, no one objects since they assume you will

be doing it! Don't mistake consent for support! We haven't shared a vision because the meeting agrees. Keener questioning and discussion in a smaller team means thorough work and better allocation of work load.

ANOTHER ADVANTAGE

Sometimes we fall for the 'my vision and my church' concept. Unquestionably God gives ministers dreams for Churches and it can be hard to believe that the clarity of one person's vision (ordained or lay) is not the whole picture! I have usually found, that what I can see so clearly is not only difficult for others to grasp but more importantly, it is not the final product. God has given it to me just to get it kicked off! It needs to be refined before it is a fully rounded vision. Only by respectfully offering it to the wider Church leadership and community, with the threat of rejection, can it broaden and expand as God intends it. Then the people who develop it begin to own it. It is their vision and, in its outworking, the Lord's hand is seen, and I will find that my dream has become a shadow in the light of the bigger thing God really wanted to do. Where a community is moving this way, the case for any longer tenure can be made, if necessary.

TASK GROUPS etc

Connexions is about handing the Church back to the Church! The Report's ideas have already helped many congregations to uncover fresh focus and direction and unlock gifts of service. One of the facets of this has been that the minister no longer chairs, (or even attends) every meeting. It might appear some kind of heresy for the minister not to chair the Worship Group, but by involving more people in worship development, they are better involved in the offering of worship. That's how it is meant to be. We do need wisdom to know when we are having people support our ministry, and when we are intentionally releasing them into their God-given ministries.

THE FUTURE

The increasing complexity of life and changing expectations of ministry have raised enormous issues for the Church. This Conference of 2006 received a report on Candidating as well as one on the Health of Ministers. Providentially, the recommendations for team ministry in the 2002 Connexions Report, provides a useful contribution to addressing these and some of the other concerns ministers have today, namely the management of stress, the use and development of God-given gifts, in-service training, and work practices.

The Connexions recommendations (agreed by Conference 2002) that we should no longer have Circuits that consist of just one congregation, and that the role of Districts be reviewed, actually provide important keys to unlocking the way forward. The former recommendation has been viewed as a threat that it was never meant to be. It is not about removing the minister but releasing him/her into a team of colleagues for the service to Christ to that area. However good a congregation thinks the minister is, it is simply impossible for one person to exercise the full ministry Christ has given the Church. It is foolish, not to say unscriptural, to try! But, if congregations received ministry from their key minister, with other ordained and lay people bringing their visions and complementing one another with varied skills, then not only would the Church survive, it would be better structured for growth and maturity.

This means our first task today is to build strong communities of trusting and interdependent relationships. Within these, we can be more accountable to one another and learn to work in the harmony which is the sign of God's love for his world.

FINALLY

If you are being re-stationed this year, you will be facing a period of uncertainty about the new place. Remember that when the Lord called us, he knew the Church into which he was calling us. The truth that one sows and another reaps in ministry, is nowhere more starkly seen than in stationing. It emphasises that we serve in Christ's Church where he is not a titular figurehead but an active director working, not to keep congregations and ministers happy, but to make us all holy!

God anoint you and bless the work to which he has called you.



Letter to a Circuit Steward

Dear Hilary,

First of all let me thank you, as I am sure your minister has already done, for remaining in post as Circuit Steward during the Connexions transition on your Circuit from Leaders' and Quarterly Meetings, to Church Councils and a Circuit Executive. I realise that you had already 'done a year' under the old system and will now do at least two or possibly the maximum three years in the new structure.

A NEW JOB

Your job has changed substantially from the days when Circuit Stewards were responsible for collating the monies from the different Societies; preparing books for audit and looking after the manses, not to mention helping the minister in whatever ways possible. Circuit Treasurers now have oversight for the financial affairs of the Societies and the Manse Steward has his or her responsibility clearly laid out.

It is the undefined side of your old job that now becomes the job description for your new one! That is to provide support to the Superintendent minister and when necessary or fitting to act as the official lay representative of the Circuit at civic and other functions. Your role in relation to the Superintendent is primarily that of being an advisor and taking pastoral interest in his or her work, life and where appropriate, family.

APPRAISALS FOR MINISTERS

Every minister in the Irish Methodist Church should now be involved in an Accompanied Self-Appraisal. An accompanist will already have been assigned to help your minister reflect on his or her life and work. Appraisals take place about every two years, and may result in suggested changes of work practice, or seeking out further training. You need to be aware that this is happening, enquire how it is going, and encourage positive developments.

THE CIRCUIT EXECUTIVE

Your interest and advice will be especially important when the meetings of the Circuit Executive are taking place. As you know, the Executive is comprised of all the ministers, officials like yourself, the Manse Steward and Circuit Treasurer, together with the Society Steward and a representative of each Church on the Circuit. This relatively small number of people is charged with deliberating and deciding on Circuit matters. These include co-ordinating the life of the Churches in the area, their finance, matters to do with appointment of

ministers and lay workers, manses, Local Preachers, recommending Candidates for ordained ministry and electing representatives to Synod and Conference. How all this is actually done, is up to the Executive itself, but your advice to the Superintendent will be invaluable. Don't be afraid to say how some things are done in your own secular work – we need to be business-like for God!

GETTING AROUND AND HAVING HELP

You will find that your job will be easier if you can make a point of moving around the Circuit to events and services, during your three years in office. It might be an idea to chat beforehand with the local Church Steward as your presence can be an encouragement to him or her also. Catching a sense of the atmosphere and getting to know the people and their worship will equip you in unexpected ways in case of a crisis or a major development being proposed.

On a large circuit, it is perfectly in order for an Assistant Circuit Steward to be appointed to work with you. This may be a person designated to succeed you in a year's time or another person who shares the job in a manner defined by the Executive. That person would also only serve for a maximum three years.

STATIONING

Now the dreaded task – Stationing! As Circuit Steward you will be one of maybe two or three representatives appointed by the Executive, to discuss a change of minister with the District Stationer. Stationing is a progression of consultations that take place during the months of October to February each year. As you know, the change of a minister can be quite an unexpected event, both for the circuit and the minister and family concerned! Sensitivity, discretion and prayerfulness are all essential attributes for your task of ongoing consultation. Stationing is an involved and delicate process, which takes place for the benefit of the whole of the Methodist Church in Ireland. Of course, that can be very difficult to appreciate at local level when a change is suggested. It is also easily misunderstood that the early proposals are precisely those, and are open to alteration as the procedure unfolds. The draft of recommendations to Conference is not finalised until the end of February each year and until then, changes in proposals may take place.

When a change is suggested the District Stationer will be in contact with you as the spokesperson for the Circuit. You, and the group the Executive may have appointed, will have to rely heavily on your own knowledge of the circuit for these conversations. Your only source of information about the new minister must be gleaned from the District Stationer as it is not permissible to contact the circuit from which the person is coming, or indeed to contact him or her directly, until the final decision is made in February. Then you can begin to plan a briefing for the new arrival!

By the way if your circuit, even if a City Mission, wishes a minister to remain beyond the eighth year, you need to be alert to making the request for an extension during your minister's sixth year. The procedure for doing this is outlined in the Manual of Laws – chapter 4 para. 32

THANK YOU AGAIN

Hilary, you will find that this is not an exhaustive job spec! Every Circuit Steward will bring his or her own personality and gifts to the role. You have a wonderful ability to work in a team and the knack of getting people to enjoy working together. As a Circuit representative to the District Synods you will not only learn more about the wider Church, but conversations with others will enable you to learn as well as offer your own experience to them. Above all, keep prayer for the ministers on the Circuit at the top of your agenda.



Letter to a Manse Steward and a Note for a Property Steward

Dear Joan and Michael,

Whilst I writing one letter to both of you, because your jobs overlap a bit, I would point out that each of you will find better guidance for yourselves and your Task Groups, if I refer you to the 'book of rules' – the Manual of Laws! The Manual is available on disc (from No9 Resource Centre or online at www.irishmethodist.org) and contains the regulations about properties – standards, maintenance, use, insurance, letting etc. When amendments are made they are printed in the Minutes of Conference. As Manse Steward Joan, you will find that the manse regulations were completely revised. Don't panic - the section can be found in the 2005 Minutes, from page 119!

MANSE STEWARD

Having mentioned manses, I will keep going! You have been appointed by, and report to, the Circuit Executive. Each of the three Churches (Societies) on your Circuit has two representatives on the Executive. Local Church Councils may very well have things to say about manses, but remember it is the Executive that makes the decisions.

Your task is to lead a small team to look after the two manses and I suggest one or two of the Property Stewards might serve on that group.

MANSE REGULATIONS

The Manual's rules exist to ensure that good standards and practices are maintained throughout the Connexion. It could be said that whilst the Circuit provides the house, the minister and his/her family have the right to make it their home. Both occupants and Churches need to respect this principle. For instance, it should never be assumed that the manse is an extra meeting place for Committees. Any that take place must be at the invitation and discretion of the minister. The practice of one minister should not be a precedent for the next.

CHECK IT OUT

To ensure that the house is kept structurally sound and well decorated, your Manse Group must inspect it annually, discuss needs with the family and prioritise necessary work. The Executive should budget for refurbishments and for major redecoration at a change of minister. Of course you will need to be given authority to spend money without first going to the Executive - burst pipes do have to be fixed!

NEW ARRIVALS

The Home Mission Department issues a Conference-approved list of manse furniture and accommodation requirements. At a forthcoming change of minister, you and he/she will receive a check-list of preparations to be made for the arriving family. The practice is that families leave a manse as they would like to find it. Of course there is always potential for problems, but there are rules that apply when the condition of the manse is found to be unsatisfactory. The guidelines outline the expected standard.

FINANCIAL HELP

Provided the regulations are being observed, the Home Mission Department is willing to provide some financial assistance to needy circuits in their efforts to repair, refurbish or purchase manses. The District Home Mission Secretary can guide you with this. By the way,

if there is vacant manse on your circuit it is also the responsibility of your group. The appropriate rules for letting are on page 200 of the 2005 Minutes of Conference. It is crucial that any letting agreement is short-term and receives the approval of the Property Board of the Methodist Church in Ireland. It is equally important that rental income is kept in a separate account to be used only for manse purposes.

Joan, I believe you are ideally suited to leading your Manse Group. You have loads of common sense, an eye for detail and the necessary diplomacy! Don't forget, you are not alone and the guidelines are there to back you up when it comes to getting things done.

A Note to the Local Property Steward

Michael, it can be a thankless job to look after the security, safety and maintenance of church buildings. When everything is fine, nobody notices, but a Celsius degree below on a Sunday morning and you will hear more about the freezing temperature than the worship! You will need to work with the Society Steward and those who welcome worshippers or prepare for events. The location of keys, clearance of fire-exits, kitchen use and storage are all cogs to be discreetly oiled.

The Church Council has appointed you and your Task Group to ensure that the buildings are suitable vehicles for the mission of the Church. It is worth spending time to ask, 'How can the Mission of this Church be reflected in our buildings?' Sadly, we underestimate the influence our physical environment has on the manner and atmosphere of our worship and witness. A little used, poorly kept or dim building makes for depressing worship and besieged Christians.

THE RULES

Your church buildings are all vested in the Trustees of the Methodist Church in Ireland, therefore no structural alteration, letting or sale, can take place without approval from the Property Board. This is obtained in consultation with the District Property Committee. The Board itself is always willing to discuss a Church's various needs and aspirations. Every five years a Commission will visit the Circuit to discuss both mission and property. It's an external audit to encourage rather than fault-find, and you will need to arrange for professional electrical and timber reports.

Michael, I am sure your interest and expertise in building matters will be great asset to the local Society as you and your team act as 'doorkeepers in the house of the Lord'. So, from the fixing of the heating, to monitoring the opening and closing of the doors and overseeing the building of the extension – or whatever you're asked to do, may you know God's blessing, the goodwill of His people and gladness in your own heart in your service to Christ and his Church,

FAQ'S(Frequently Asked Questions)

1. In our Church, it would suit us better to vary from the procedures for setting up a Council or Executive. Can we do this?

Yes. The legislation sets out the normal way of proceeding, but it is not a straight-jacket for every situation. However, if you decide to vary from the legislation, it is vital that you keep a clear written record of exactly

- i) why you are varying from the norm;
- ii) what practice you are adopting;
- iii) how it has been agreed.

You should also seek advice from the Home Mission or Conference Office before proceeding.

2 Communication between circuits and the connexion

In the past oral reports given at Synod were heard by those present who had come to represent their circuit and those coming to present other reports. The assumption was that the Circuit representatives would relay the information from at least 21 reports to the local congregations. Unless the minister or representative had particular interest or commitment to so doing, this proved a less than effective means of giving or receiving information.

In order to seek to increase the flow of information between connexional bodies and local Circuits the Steering Group makes the following suggestions:

- a) that Circuit Superintendents give particular attention to completing the Home Mission Schedules each year which request postage, telephone and email addresses of Church and Circuit Secretaries. This will enable a database to be built which can be amended annually.
- b) The job description of Church Secretaries and Circuit Secretaries should contain the brief that they are willing to be copied with such materials as may need to be passed to Church Councils and Circuit meetings from Connexional bodies and that they will ensure that such items are on the agenda of the appropriate meeting.
- c) That Circuit Executives and Church Councils include on their agendas the question, "What information, decision or request has come from Connexional Committees?"
- d) Connexional Committee convenors should ensure that every meeting of the Committee there is on the Agenda, "What information needs to be given from this to local Churches and Circuits and how shall this be done" ? Any information to be conveyed to local Churches and Circuits should be forwarded to the Home Mission Department via email. The HMD will ensure distribution of the information as requested by the Committees via the database established in a) above.
- e) that where another person with particular responsibility for a section of work (ie MWI, DYCW, MMS(I) etc CSR) is named to the particular Department, that person may be the contact person in addition to the Circuit or Church Secretary

3. The Circuit / Society authority

The Circuit Executive has replaced the Quarterly Meeting, and therefore the body with ultimate authority on matters such as property permissions; grants; stationing etc. Serious differences of viewpoint, or perceptions of vision, or conflicts of interest, cannot be decided quickly and Circuit Executives and Societies need to give time to their resolution and be open to assistance from District Advisory or Pastoral teams as appointed by Synod. The decisions we take as the Church of Jesus Christ mean we defer to one another in love and seek the providential guidance and action of God, especially when opinions are sharply divided. Circuit Executives and Church Councils are charged with working co-operatively to ensure faithful worship and witness across the circuit

4. CHANGES TO THE MANUAL OF LAWS

The following is the 'legislation' which was incorporated into the Manual of Laws by Conference 2005 in order to give effect to the changes in Society and Circuit structures arising from the ConneXions process:-

CHAPTER 10 CIRCUIT ORGANISATION

(amended 2005)

10.01 *The official meetings of a Circuit shall be:*

- *The Congregational Meeting,*
- *The Church Council,*
- *The Circuit Meeting,*
- *The Circuit Executive,*
- *The Trustees' Meeting, where appropriate.*

The Congregational Meeting

10.02 *At least once each year, the Church Council shall arrange a Congregational Meeting for fellowship and inspiration.*

10.03 *The Congregational Meeting shall:*

- (a) *Review the previous twelve months and celebrate advances made,*
- (b) *Set out goals for the next twelve months,*
- (c) *Discuss the vision of the Church for the ensuing five years,*
- (d) *Ratify the appointment of Church Officials upon the nomination of the Minister,*
- (e) *Elect members of the Church Council upon the nomination of the Minister, as required,*
- (f) *Through the Secretary convey to the Church Council for its consideration concerns expressed or recommendations made.*

The Church Council

10.04 *The aim of every congregation is to glorify God through its worship and its witness within its community. Methodist congregations achieve this with the encouragement of, and by commitment to, the Methodist Church in Ireland.*

10.05 *To ensure that this aim is achieved, every Society shall be governed by a Church Council. (A Church Council may govern more than one Society.) The Council shall:*

- (a) *Produce a succinct Mission Statement to encapsulate the direction the Church wishes to take,*
- (b) *Review this Mission Statement from time to time,*
- (c) *Annually set achievable goals for the fulfilment of the Church's mission within the terms of the Mission Statement,*
- (d) *Establish Working Groups, with clear guidelines and sufficient authority to achieve the specific goals assigned to them,*
- (e) *Assist the members of the congregation in using their gifts and experience to serve the kingdom of God,*
- (f) *Annually guide the congregation in celebrating the advances of the previous twelve months and in identifying the next steps in the fulfilment of its mission,*
- (g) *Consider and promote the spiritual life of the Society,*
- (h) *Promote and extend the mission of the Society in the local community,*
- (i) *Encourage Council Members, through mutual consultation and prayer, to discharge their duties more effectively.*

- 10.06** *The Church Council shall be responsible for the oversight of the work of God in the Society, including:*
- (a) *Arrangements for worship,*
 - (b) *Pastoral care, nurturing and discipling of the congregation,*
 - (c) *Identification of training needs and the implementation of training within the Society,*
 - (d) *Reception, discipline and exclusion of members as required by the laws of the Church (Ch 5),*
 - (e) *Work with children and young people,*
 - (f) *The role of the Society within the Circuit and the Connexion, including Connexional activities, publications and funds,*
 - (g) *Evangelism and witness of the society in the local community, including cooperation with other churches,*
 - (h) *Arranging at least one Congregational Meeting each year, which shall be announced on the four Sundays prior to the meeting*
 - (i) *The finance of the Society,*
 - (j) *Maintenance, letting and insurance of all property entrusted to the Society, subject to such rights and obligations, if any, as may be vested in Local Trustees,*
 - (k) *Communication with the congregation relating to the work of the Council.*
- 10.07** *The Council shall meet at least four times each year. No meeting of the Council shall be convened without the prior approval of the Minister.*
- 10.08** *The quorum required for a meeting of the Church Council shall be one-third of the total membership of the Council.*
- 10.09** *The Council may appoint individual members of the Council or working parties, which need not be exclusively composed of members of the Council, to undertake specific tasks relating to the responsibilities of the Council.*
- (a) *The Council shall appoint at least one of its members to each working party.*
 - (b) *Each individual or working party shall be given specific terms of reference and shall report to the Council.*
 - (c) *The Council shall designate one of its members on each working party to report on its behalf to the Council.*
 - (d) *Reports from individuals or working parties should be submitted in writing in advance of Council meetings.*
 - (e) *A working party may, if circumstances warrant, be given powers to act on behalf of the Council and the Society within clearly specified parameters.*
- 10.10** *In Societies with worshipping congregations of up to about thirty people the congregation itself may be the Church Council, subject to the provisions of para 10.24, below.*
- 10.11** *The term 'Church Council' shall henceforth be deemed to include the term 'Leaders' Meeting' where appropriate throughout the Manual of Laws.*

Constitution of the Church Council

- 10.12** *The Council shall be constituted as follows:*
- (a) *The **Minister** responsible for the Society, who shall preside at meetings of the Council, or delegate the responsibility of presiding to another minister or member of the Council,*
 - (b) ***Other ministers and probationers** in the active work assigned to the work of the Society,*
 - (c) *The **Church Officials** (as listed in para 10.22),*
 - (d) *The **elected members** (as described in para 10.17-10.21).*
- 10.13** *Persons appointed by the Circuit who have a pastoral responsibility in the Society(ies) may be invited to give reports from time to time.*
- 10.14** *The Circuit Superintendent shall be ex-officio a member of the Council.*
- 10.15** *In the interests of continuity the retiring Society Steward shall be an ex-officio member of the Council for one year following his/her retirement from that office.*
- 10.16** *Only Members of the Methodist Church in Ireland are eligible to be members of the Church Council.*

Elected Members

- 10.17** *The number of elected members of the Church Council shall be a multiple of three not exceeding 18 as determined by the Council from time to time, bearing in mind the need adequately to reflect the nature of the congregation, while also seeking the smallest number consistent with the efficient oversight of the affairs of the Society.*
- 10.18** *One-third of the elected members of the Council shall retire each year and normally shall not be eligible for re-election for at least one year.*
- 10.19** *Each year in the autumn the Council shall appoint three of its members to constitute the Advisory Group to consult with the Minister on nominations and appointments for the ensuing year.*
- 10.20** *The Minister shall, after consultation with the Advisory Group, nominate suitable Church Members to be listed on the ballot paper for election to the Council by the Congregational Meeting.*
- 10.21** *In the event of a casual vacancy on the Council, the Council shall co-opt a Member of the Society to fill the vacancy until the next appropriate Congregational Meeting. Church Officials*
- 10.22** *A Society shall have the following Church Officials, who shall normally hold office for three years:*
- (a) The **Society Steward**, who shall be regarded as the official lay representative of the Society and shall support and encourage the Minister(s) and congregation in the development of the Work of God. When necessary, the Society Steward may also serve as Secretary, but not as Treasurer or Property Steward.*
 - (b) The **Treasurer**, who shall be responsible to the Council for all financial income of the Society, for its proper use or transmission as appropriate and for the prompt payment of all accounts. He/she shall keep accurate accounts and submit them for annual audit, according to the requirements of Conference.*
 - (c) The **Property Steward**, who shall be responsible to the Council for the proper maintenance of all property.*
 - (d) The **Secretary**, who shall in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Council prepare the Agenda for meetings and issue notices in writing in good time and shall record the proceedings in a Minute Book for that purpose. He/she shall also act as Secretary to the Congregational Meeting.*
- 10.23** *A **Society Steward-Designate** may be nominated one year in advance of a vacancy in that office and may attend Church Council meetings during the year but will not be eligible to vote.*

Special Provisions for Small Societies

- 10.24** *In Societies with worshipping congregations of up to about thirty people, the congregation itself may be the Church Council.*
- (a) Such a congregational Church Council shall be subject to all provisions relating to Church Councils except as indicated below.*
 - (b) Notice of congregational Council meetings shall normally be given at least one week in advance and may be by pulpit announcement.*
 - (c) Congregational Council meetings may be held following Sunday worship, and all decisions must be minuted and the minutes confirmed and signed.*
 - (d) The quorum required for a meeting of a congregational Church Council shall be all those present at a meeting for which proper notice has been given, provided at least four adults from the Society are present.*
 - (e) The Council shall appoint three of its members to advise the Minister on the nomination of Church Officials.*
 - (f) Church Officials may, where necessary, be Members of other Societies.*
 - (g) The Council shall ratify the appointment of Church Officials upon the nomination of the Minister.*
 - (h) The Church Officials (in consultation with the Minister), or the Council itself, may designate persons in the congregation to undertake specific tasks.*
 - (i) The Church Officials, in consultation with the Minister, shall ensure that the congregational Church Council adopts and updates a Mission Statement, sets annual achievable goals, and discharges all responsibilities laid upon the Church Council.*

The Circuit Meeting

- 10.25** *In a Circuit there shall be a Circuit Meeting for the purpose of :*
- (a) Providing mutual support and fellowship;*
 - (b) Electing Circuit Officials, upon nomination by the Superintendent Minister assisted by Circuit Executive;*
 - (c) Sharing stories of the work of God, thereby enabling Societies to learn from each other;*
 - (d) Passing on information to Societies from the Circuit, District or Connexion.*
- 10.26** *The Circuit Meeting shall consist of :*
- (a) Members of the Church Councils and the Working Parties thereof,*
 - (b) Members of the Circuit Executive,*
 - (c) Fully accredited local preachers in the active work,*
 - (d) Class Leaders or their equivalent,*
 - (e) Lay persons employed by the Circuit or its constituents in a pastoral capacity,*
 - (f) Members of the Circuit who are local trustees or who hold District or Connexional office or are members of District or Connexional committees, and*
 - (g) Ministers on the Circuit, including retired ministers and those without pastoral charge.*
- 10.27** *The Superintendent Minister is responsible for ensuring that the Circuit Meeting is properly chaired.*
- 10.28** *The Circuit Secretary shall act as secretary of the Circuit Meeting.*
- 10.29** *The Circuit Meeting shall be held at least once a year, early in the Connexional year.*

The Circuit Executive

- 10.30** *In each Circuit there shall be a Circuit Executive for the purpose of deliberation and decision-making in relation to matters of Circuit responsibility.*
- 10.31** *The Circuit Executive shall have responsibility in relation to the following:*
- (a) Co-ordination of the work of the Societies, with an emphasis on strategy and vision for the area;*
 - (b) Ministerial and remunerated lay appointments in the Circuit;*
 - (c) Candidates for the ministry, upon nomination by the Superintendent;*
 - (d) Election of Circuit representatives to District Synod and to Conference;*
 - (e) Purchase and up-keep of manses on the Circuit;*
 - (f) Trustees' business, where appropriate;*
 - (g) Local Preachers' business, where appropriate;*
 - (h) Annual financial audit of Circuit and society accounts;*
 - (i) Management of Circuit accounts and oversight of society accounts;*
 - (j) Applications from Societies for Connexional approval or for grants from Connexional bodies;*
 - (k) Arrangement of Circuit Meetings;*
 - (l) Assisting the Superintendent Minister in the nomination of Circuit Officials for election by the Circuit Meeting.*
 - (m) Links with other churches.*
- 10.32** *The Circuit Executive will meet as necessary, at times and places determined by the Superintendent Minister, and as a minimum at least once each quarter.*
- 10.33** *The quorum required for a meeting of the Circuit Executive shall be one-third of all members.*
- 10.34** *The Circuit Secretary shall ensure that the proceedings of the Circuit Executive are duly recorded, and in consultation with the Superintendent Minister, summon the meeting and prepare the agenda.*
- 10.35** *The Circuit Executive shall be chaired by the Superintendent Minister or by another member of the Circuit Executive designated by the Superintendent Minister.*

- 10.36** *Within these parameters, the Circuit Executive may establish its own procedures and structure for itself and the Circuit.*

Constitution of the Circuit Executive

- 10.37** *The Circuit Executive shall consist of :*
- (a) *Ministers in the active work appointed to work on the various Societies of the Circuit;*
 - (b) *Circuit Officials, as listed in para 10.39, below;*
 - (c) *The Society Steward of each society;*
 - (d) *One other representative of each Society designated by its Church Council.*
 - (e) *Each trust shall have the right to have one representative at a meeting of the Circuit Executive at which matters relating to that particular trust property are on the agenda.*
 - (f) *The Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting shall have the right to have one representative at a meeting of the Circuit Executive at which matters relating to Local Preachers are on the agenda.*

Single Society Circuits

- 10.38** *Where a Circuit consists of a single Society, the Congregational Meeting may undertake the responsibilities of the Circuit Meeting and the Church Council the responsibilities of the Circuit Executive, in which case the Circuit Officials shall be ex-officio members of the Church Council.*

Circuit Officials

- 10.39** *A Circuit shall have the following Officials, who shall normally hold office for three years:*
- (a) **Circuit Steward**, *who shall provide spiritual, pastoral and advisory support to the Superintendent Minister and shall be regarded as the official lay representative of the Circuit at civic and other appropriate occasions.*
 - (b) **Circuit Treasurer.**
 - (c) **Manse Steward.**
 - (d) **Circuit Secretary.**
- 10.40** *A Circuit may also have an Assistant Circuit Steward or Circuit Steward-designate, as determined from time-to-time by the Circuit Executive.*
- 10.41** *For legal purposes, Society Stewards shall also be considered Officials of the Circuit.*
- 10.42** *The term 'Circuit Executive' shall henceforth be deemed to include the term 'Quarterly Meeting', where appropriate throughout the Manual of Laws.*

Decision making in the local congregation

To follow the purposes of God in the church, a congregation needs vision and an understanding that decisions need to be taken to follow that vision.

Once the vision is in place, there are decisions that need to be taken at different times. These are decisions about mission and ministry priorities. These decisions are not all same - some will take longer to make than others; some will involve the whole congregation or the Church Council; others can be made by one or two people: they all demand trust and the realisation that in making decisions, no one can get it right all the time!

Below is an outline of how we can view the leadership and decision-making processes in the life of the local Church.

Type 1 **Consensus** about the future direction and overall mission goals of the congregation.

The annual congregational meeting is the ideal place for enabling a local Church to move towards reaching a mission vision, since that is where you will be

- celebrating the past twelve months
- addressing goals for the next twelve months
- thinking about where you want to be in 2, 3 or even 10 years time

Some congregations find it helpful to have a special weekend, day or evening in preparation for this annual meeting. Such times provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussion. The key thing is to enable as many people as possible to express their hopes dreams and fears.

Type 2 **Directions** that help to achieve the Church's goals

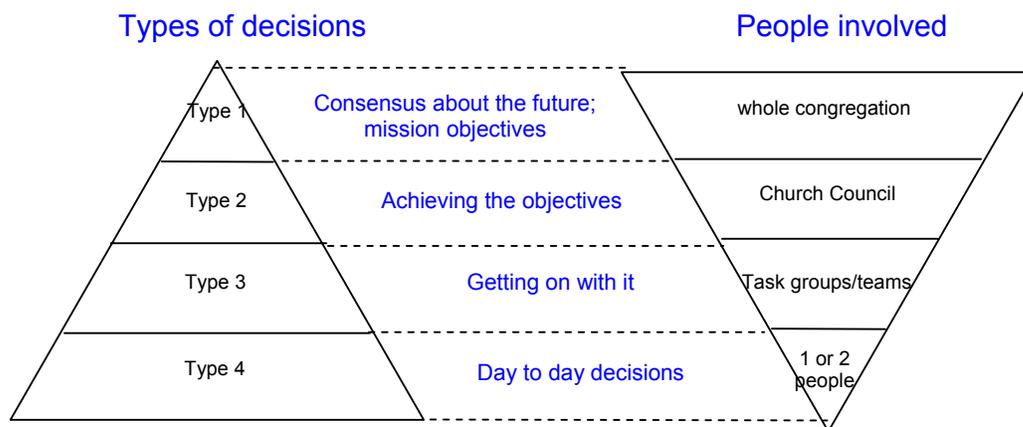
It is the job of the Council to put the vision into a portable form and communicate aims to the congregation. This involves taking decisions that set a course for the congregation to work out the objectives which have been identified.

Type 3 **Exploratory decisions** of Working/Task groups keep the momentum going

Task groups are set parameters and given responsibility to put into practice policies of the Council. In doing so, each group will have to make quarterly or monthly decisions, most of which do not require a meeting of the Church Council. The team or task group always reports to the Council.

Type 4 **Day to day running decisions**

These are entrusted to one or two people, especially those who have been given clear responsibility for specific areas of the Church's life, acting in keeping with the overall direction of the congregation, and preparing rotas, programme details, etc.



5. A Vision for Irish Methodists

1

a vision for Irish Methodists prepared for Conference 09

*this section can be downloaded from the website as a
colour leaflet at:*

<http://www.irishmethodist.org/about/vision.php>

**“Receiving from God....
we give together”**

- ❖ ***Giving together to God***
....worship

- ❖ ***Giving together to others***
....witness

- ❖ ***Giving to one another***
....wholeness

1 John 3:16 “We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters” (NLT)

2

WORSHIP - giving together to God

Worship is more about who God **is** than about what we **do**.

It is affirming the worth of God who is “here and there”!

Theologians’ describe this as God being

IMMANENT (here) AND TRANSCENDENT (there)

God’s immanence means that all human experience is shot through with divine presence.

Our God is personal and active, whose Spirit breathes on us.

God’s transcendence means God is beyond the limits of human knowledge and experience.

God is eternal and holy. The hosts of heaven bow in worship.

Worship which does not acknowledge both God’s immanence and transcendence is not true worship.

Intimacy and **AWE** are appropriate responses.

HOW ?

Jesus said “*God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth* (John 4:24)

This means we need to:

give praise – in heart and voice;

pray – both personally and together;

receive – forgiveness and healing

learn – instruction from scripture and hearing it as God’s Word, it can touch us directly;

respond - by the dedicating our abilities, wealth and love to God

Worshippers should be enabled to participate in all these elements of worship.

Jesus commanded us to celebrate Holy Communion. It is the primary place of intimacy and awe where he has promised to meet us

3

WITNESS - giving others the gift of ourselves

What does it include?

- ❖ intentionally telling the message of Jesus' love so that others become his followers;
- ❖ showing his love in acts of selfless service; (the Good Samaritan)
- ❖ working for the welfare of all people (the Innkeeper)
- ❖ caring for the earth its people and its resources

Why?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
to proclaim freedom to the prisoners
recovery of sight to the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

Luke 4; 18-19

The manifesto of Jesus (Luke 4; 18-19) includes telling the story of God's love which knows no favouritism and his desire that oppression must end. At the centre is the compassionate act of healing. By placing compassion in the centre, Jesus emphasises that it is central to Christian discipleship. It is only a lifestyle characterised by love that has authority to act for freedom or proclaim salvation.

How? *To be Christ-like, Christian mission must be humble and dependent on the generosity of those to whom it is offered. Jesus recognised not only the needs of the poor but also honoured their dignity when he made sure his missionaries were dependent for food, clothes and shelter from those to whom they were sent. (Matt 10;10-11.)*

4

TOWARDS WHOLENESS. . . by giving together to one another in love

Romans 12;5-13 - very important verses for us today!

“..in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts,” Being a *member* of the Church *is being a body part designed to function* *finger eye leg hand ear arm knee mouth hip*

What you DO matters. Others depend on it.

preachers who elicit responses

quiet servers who do the right thing at right time – often unnoticed

teachers who research and explain the Bible

encouragers who say timely and helpful things

the hospitable and generous who answer needs spontaneously

leaders who organise and manage without causing rancour

those whose self-effacing compassion advertises the beauty of Christ

No person is without a gift God has given

No one owns the title deeds to the Body of Christ

but but **BUT**we must complement one another’s gifts, by worshipping, witnessing and working together.

LOVE IS THE KEY *see verses 10 & 11*

*“be devoted to one another with genuine affection.
Honour one another above yourselves”*

CHRISTIAN WITNESS JUST DOESN’T WORK WITHOUT THIS KIND OF LOVE!

**THIS IS WHY --- WE GIVE TO ONE ANOTHER...
TO SEEK WHOLENESS**

5 **MINISTERS**

There is no such person as the omni-competent minister. God has made sure of that! It is helpful to think of the ministry of Jesus. When he left his disciples, it would have been impossible for a single one to continue his ministry. SO.. he gave them his Spirit, TO DO IT TOGETHER!.

In Ephesians (4; 11) these are called the fivefold ministries of Christ. The reason for separate yet united ministries is to prepare the Church for the work of ministry to God's world.

Properly understood, Jesus' leadership ministry is shared. Every leader, ordained or not, is a helper, using her/his particular gifts to prompt and enable the whole mission of God.

'One person ministry' can damage the person's health. It is also spiritually unhealthy (and unbiblical!) for a local Church to become attached to one person's ministry.

MINISTERS AS MEMBERS OF A TEAM

The Methodist Church in Ireland wants to move towards team ministry to offer, more effectively, the whole counsel of God to the Body of Christ.

This would not mean an ordained person will no longer have responsibility for a particular congregation. It does mean that enabling the congregation for the work of ministry (Eph 4) will be the task of several people.

Just as a Health Care Team brings different disciplines to a health care package, yet the patient has an identified team member, so with Church ministry – each congregation will have an identified servant leader.

**We must be team because God,
as Trinity, is team.**

The priority of MCI is to shape every Church as a body of the Christ, to participate in God's mission.

This means exploring new horizons when we sense God's call to do so by depending on his grace which always goes before us

HOME MISSION FORUM 2009

In order to complete the remaining recommendations of the Connexions Report adopted by the Conference of 2002, the Home Mission Forum has been directed to continue working to promote the practice of close collaboration between Circuits in furthering the mission of God.

Conference 2009 instructed the Forum to consult with Districts and Circuits to consider if and how changes to Circuit structures and boundaries might enable the practice of team ministry in the future, and report its findings to a future Conference.

The Forum has also been advised to consider setting up a pilot project or projects so that any future proposal might be exemplified before the Conference makes a long term decision to implement a structure that affects the whole Connexion.

Home Mission Forum 2009-10

Rev Donald Ker (President and Secretary Of Conference),

Rev Richard Johnston (Committee Chair), Mrs Elaine Barnett (Convenor)

Rev Des Bain, Mr Tom Wilson, Mrs Laura Griffith , Miss Jill Harper, Mr Simon Kilpatrick

Rev John Alderdice, Rev Mervyn Ewing, Mrs Margaret Copeland

Rev Laurence Graham, Rev Robin Waugh

Also participating; Rev Paul Kingston (c) (President Designate), Mr Alan Shiel (Home Mission Administrator)

If you have comments, or contributions to chapter 5, please contact the Convenor;

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