

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?