

Methodist Conference

LONDONDERRY 2008

AGENDA OF THE REPRESENTATIVE SESSION

(Subject to such modifications as may be necessary.)

FRIDAY, 6 JUNE

19.30 Constitution of the Conference

ELECTION AND INSTALLATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND
Carlisle Road Methodist Church, Londonderry

SATURDAY, 7 JUNE

09.15 Prayers
Welcome
Appointment of Committees
Hours of Sitting
Letters of Sympathy and Greeting
Notices of Motion
Election of Secretary, Assistant Secretaries and Letter Writers
Nomination of Representatives to the British Conference

10.00 MISSION IN IRELAND - 1
Church Development Board including
Home Mission Department
Property Board

10.45 - BREAK

11.15 MISSION AND MINISTRY
Edgehill College
Accompanied Self Appraisal
Sabbaticals Committee
Local Preachers

11.45 GREETINGS FROM THE BRITISH CONFERENCE AND OTHER
CHURCHES

12.15 WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY
“On the Edge of Pentecost”
Rev. Thomas Stuckey

12.45 - LUNCH

14.00 MISSION AND FINANCE - 1
Stipends and Allowances Board

Ministerial Stipends
Retirement Funds
Children's Fund
Ministers' Medical Fund

14.45 MISSION AND CHURCH LIFE - 1
General Committee
Bureau of Membership - Statistics

16.00 CONVERSATION ON THE WORK OF GOD

16.45 - TEA

17.30 MISSION IN THE CITY
City Missions

18.00 FAITH AND ORDER

18.45 Adjourn

19.30 YOUTH NIGHT
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School, Limavady Road, Londonderry

SUNDAY, 8 JUNE

10.30 CONFERENCE WORSHIP CELEBRATION
Carlisle Road Methodist Church, Londonderry at 10.30 am. The Preacher is the President of the Conference, The Reverend Dr Martyn Atkins, who will be assisted by Reverend Steve Wild and Clarence.

13.00 - LUNCH

14.30 Administration
Daily Record

14.40 RECEPTION INTO FULL CONNEXION

14.50 TRIBUTES TO MINISTERS PERMITTED TO RETIRE

15.30 MISSION IN THE WORLD
Methodist Missionary Society (Ireland)
Methodist Women in Ireland
World Development and Relief

16.30 SERVICE OF COMMISSIONING FOR FIRST YEAR
PROBATIONERS

16.45 - TEA

19.15 ORDINATION SERVICE
Millennium Forum, Londonderry
Seats must be reserved for this Service by obtaining tickets from the Clooney Hall Centre, 71348531 or by email on office@clooneyhall.org.uk

MONDAY, 9 JUNE

09.15 Prayers
Administration
Daily Record
Report of Nominations Committee
Elections to the British Conference

09.45 MISSION TOGETHER
Covenant Council
Inter Church Relations

10.15 MISSION AND YOUTH
Department of Youth and Children's Work
Child Care Society

10.45 - BREAK

11.15 MISSION AND SOCIETY
Council on Social Responsibility

12.15 WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY
“On the Edge of Pentecost”
Rev. Thomas Stuckey

12.45 - LUNCH

14.00 MISSION IN IRELAND - 2
Home Mission Forum

14.45 MISSION AND LEARNING
Board of Education
Colleges and Schools
Methodist College
Wesley College
Gurteen College

15.30 MISSION AND CHURCH LIFE - 2
General Committee

16.00 Election of President - Designate
Election of District Superintendents

16.10 SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE FOR DECEASED MINISTERS

16.45 - TEA

17.30 MISSION AND CARE
Hospital and Prison Chaplaincy
Ministry of Healing
Methodist Child Care Society

Eastwell Residential Home

- 18.00 MISSION AND COMMUNICATION
Communications Committee including Methodist
Church Website
- 18.30 Wesley Historical Society
- 18.45 Adjourn
- 19.30 MISSION MEETING
Kilfennan Presbyterian Church, Londonderry. The speaker is Sue Culver from the
Methodist Church in Britain.

TUESDAY, 10 JUNE

- 09.15 Prayers
Administration
Daily Record
Elections to the General Committee
Election of the Secretaries of District Synods
- 09.45 MISSION AND FINANCE – 2
Budget Committee
Comprehensive Assessment
Trustees of the Methodist Church in Ireland
- 10.30 Adoption of Accounts
- 10.45 Appointments
- 11.00 Memorials and Uncompleted Business
- 12.00 WORSHIP
- 12.30 Closing Courtesies
- END OF CONFERENCE

12.45 - **LUNCH**

Report to Conference 2008

Purpose

1. This note sets out background information on the “Word of Faith” movement; explains briefly the Methodist Church in Ireland 's position on some of the issues for which the movement is best known; and provides guidelines to help those confronted with its claims. [1](#)

Summary

1. Though the term is a loose one, the Word of Faith movement is characterised by a particular teaching on health and material prosperity for believers. These beliefs are inconsistent with Methodist teaching and with mainstream Christianity. However our approach to the movement's adherents should be a sensitive one.

Background

1. In speaking of the Word of Faith movement we speak in essence of a movement whose central doctrine is that health and prosperity are promised to all believers, and are available through faith. Beyond that, the movement's proponents espouse a range of doctrines to varying degrees; others say they are not part of that movement but teach on similar lines.
2. The roots of the modern movement lie in the writings of E W Kenyon (1867-1948), a New England evangelical Bible teacher. The movement asserts that physical healing, prosperity and wealth were included in Christ's atonement and therefore are available here and now to all who believe.
3. Teachers within the movement tend to rely extensively on proof texts. Amongst the verses often cited are:

“By his stripes we are healed” Isaiah 53:5

“He took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses” Matthew 8:17

“Yet for your sakes he became poor, that you by his poverty might become rich” 2 Corinthians 8:9

“ Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well ” 3 John 2

The message interpreted from these texts by the movement is often one of a divine right to health and wealth.

1. Alongside this, those whose beliefs are associated with the movement will sometimes espouse the view that believers become as much an incarnation of God as was Christ, and that salvation brings not simply a oneness with God but, as one writer put it, “an exact duplication of God's kind”. There is also a vein of belief that, though he did not sin, Jesus was forsaken by God and had to be “born again” to escape hell. In addition

much emphasis is often put on the power of the spoken word to cause things to happen.

2. In June 2007, conscious of renewed interest in the movement in some localities, Conference asked the Faith and Order Committee to produce guidelines to assist Methodists.

Methodist Belief

1. These teachings of the movement are in marked contrast to Methodist doctrine—and to mainstream Christian doctrine in general. The proof texts often quoted need to be understood in the context of Scripture as a whole. Christians should pay attention to the multiple scriptures warning against emphasis on material prosperity and telling of the importance of helping the poor.
2. Books could be—and have been—written on the topic. But without trying to be comprehensive nor to cover all the nuances, the Committee would sum up relevant Methodist doctrine as follows.

a. **Christ exemplifies a life where material wealth is put in context.** He and his disciples lived a simple life whose value came from relationships, not from possessions. Some in his circle of friends were certainly well off, but Christ's teachings taken as a whole do not promise success of any physical or material sort. Their foundation is love.

b. **The emphasis of Christianity is on what the believer gives, not what s/he receives.** Christ's closest associates gave much: he warned the apostles that they would suffer great persecution for the sake of his name, and indeed all eleven, after Judas Iscariot, suffered martyr's deaths. Few are called upon to give to that extent; but for all of us the message of Christ is made real in lives lived out in community and in a spirit of offering ourselves and our talents for the furtherance of God's kingdom. Spiritual wealth is what is important. What believers may receive—including the gifts of the Holy Spirit—is received through grace, not as of right.

c. **Poverty does not signal any lack of faith**—Job's story perhaps illustrates that best—and believers have a special duty towards poor people. The Methodist tradition since Wesley has emphasized the need for believers to engage with social and ethical issues, and special responsibilities attach to those who are wealthy. Wesley's sermon on the use of money urged believers to “gain all you can [‘by honest industry’], save all you can [‘be content with what plain nature requires’], give all you can”. He exemplified the characteristics of modest living and generous benefaction in his own practice.

d. **Christ's blood atoned for our sin.** To say that he had to be born again strips him of the defining qualities of deity.

e. **God has power to heal, but healing is in his grace;** it is not a right. We do not pretend to understand why some are healed and some (equally faithful) are not; others experience a healing of spirit—the “peace that passes all understanding”—but not physical healing. It is far from trite to say that Christ journeys alongside us in our suffering.

1. In light of all this, as a Committee we must affirm that the central tenets of the Word of Faith movement are not consistent with Methodist doctrine.

Our Approach To People With Different Views

1. Nevertheless, what characterises us as Christians is not simply what we believe, but how we approach others. Christ, of course, was never afraid to speak frankly in matters of faith, and nor should we be. But at a pastoral level Christ spoke with sensitivity. He recognized that people had arrived at where they were through a variety of influences and for a variety of reasons. He was concerned to maintain a loving relationship.
2. As Methodists we have a good tradition of discussion and debate with those with whom we do not agree on matters of faith or practice. Regrettably, meaningful discussion becomes very difficult when either side relies on proof texts to the exclusion of a more holistic consideration of Scripture. Nevertheless, even where engagement is difficult, the overriding principle of love obtains. Acknowledging the immensely difficult situations to which the issues considered in this note have given rise, we call on Methodists to respond in a spirit which demonstrates both truth and grace. We pray for the guidance of the Spirit in what Christ would have us do as we encounter doctrine which causes us very real concern.

Footnote: 1 There is a Belfast-based congregation known as the “Word of Faith Church”. It is not however part of the movement described in this report.