

19. The Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers: Commitments and Expectations

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Resolutions	<p>19/1. The Conference receives the Report.</p> <p>19/2. The Conference adopts section 1, 2 and 3 of Part B with paragraphs 2, 24, and 25 from Appendix 1 inserted into section 1 before the paragraph beginning “It is therefore a mutual relationship of caring for each other...” and directs that they be published as Book IV, Part 6 of CPD.</p> <p>19/3. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to review relevant Standing Orders in the light of this report and to bring draft amendments to the Conference of 2023.</p> <p>19/4. The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring a proposal relating to the inclusion and positioning of Book V, Part 5 (Resolutions on the Pastoral Work) to the Conference of 2023.</p> <p>19/5. The Conference resolves that the commitments as proposed in paragraph 11 be made annually at the Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation, the Presbyteral Session of the Conference and the Representative Session of the Conference, beginning in 2023, and thereafter commended for use across the Connexion.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aims	To establish a series of commitments to be made and expectations to be affirmed which, together with the complementary processes of Reflective Supervision and Ministerial Development Review and the information provided through a Handbook for Methodist Ministers set out a framework of support and accountability that will enable the covenant relationship between the Conference and those who represent it in the wider Church on the one hand, and the Conference’s ministers on the other, to flourish.
Main points	<p>This report presents the fruits of a long period of consultation about how ordained ministers in the Methodist Church can be encouraged to flourish and enable the church to flourish through mutual support and accountability. Most recently, those consultations have been under the heading of <i>The Ministerial Covenant: A draft Code of Conduct</i>. This report represents a marked shift of approach in response to the feedback and further reflection.</p> <p>The material is now not just concerned with the privileges and responsibilities of ministers and with the ways that they treat people, but also the responsibilities that the members, officers, institutions, committees and Conference have towards ministers and the ways that people treat them. It sets out a series of commitments and</p>

	expectations that by the grace of God enable the renewal of the covenant relationship between the Church and its ministers.
Background context and relevant documents	Conference 2020 Agenda item 35 <i>The Ministerial Covenant: Draft Code of Conduct</i> The draft Code of Conduct (methodist.org.uk) . Courage, Cost and Hope: The Report of the Past Cases Review 2013-15 Recommendation 8 past-cases-review-2013-2015-final.pdf (methodist.org.uk)
Consultations	Faith and Order Committee Law and Polity Committee Methodist Council Formal bodies, group and individuals throughout the Connexion.

PART A: REPORT

- 1 This material has been some twenty years in the making. A number of different streams have fed into it. Amongst them, one was how to deal properly and fairly with those cases of grievance where ministers believed they were treated badly by the Church's members, officers or committees. A second was how to enable ministers to flourish by developing understandings of competence and incompetence as well as a care for their wellbeing. A third was how to respond to Recommendation 8 of the Past Cases Review of Safeguarding *Courage, Cost and Hope* adopted by the 2015 Conference which stated that "*serious consideration be given to producing a Code of Conduct for ministers along the lines of that produced by the Church of England*".
- 2 All of those concerns are interdependent. Yet it has proved hard to develop a coherent response or set of responses that addresses them all. Some of the attempts have veered towards what might be seen as contractual, managerial control of ministers. That has been unwelcome to many, and also created tensions with the Supreme Court ruling in 2013 that ministers do not have employment status. Other attempts have veered towards producing tools for reflection on the calling and practice of particular ministers by the ministers concerned and by those who support them. That has raised concerns about the overlap between this programme and those being developed for *Reflective Supervision* and *Ministerial Development Review*, and the danger of overburdening people.
- 3 Over the years a number of reports have been presented under a variety of titles and descriptions, and many consultations about them undertaken. Most recently the Conference in 2020 received a report on what was then called *The Ministerial Covenant* and described as a *Draft Code of Conduct*. The Conference commended it to the Connexion for study and response (Resolution 35/1 2020 – for the full report and the background to it see [The draft Code of Conduct \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://methodist.org.uk)).
- 4 The material has now been substantially revised and again retitled in the light of the responses received, and of comments from the Faith and Order Committee, Law and Polity Committee, Ministries Committee and the Methodist Council. It is now clearly about how ordained ministers in the Methodist Church can be encouraged to flourish and enable the Church to flourish through mutual support and accountability. As such, it is not just concerned with the privileges and responsibilities of ministers and the ways that they treat people, but also the ways that people treat ministers. It therefore seeks to set out what expectations the Methodist Church might properly have of its ministers, and what expectation the ministers might properly have of the Church, in the form of the Conference and those individuals, officers and committees that represent it locally and connexionally.
- 5 What distinguishes ordained ministers, no matter in what type of appointment they serve, or whether they are in the active work or supernumerary (ie retired), is that they are all in a covenant relationship with the Conference.

When they are received into Full Connexion, ministers enter a covenant relationship with the Conference. At the heart of this mutual relationship, made possible through God's grace, both the ministers and the Conference have appropriate privileges and responsibilities: "Under the will of God the ministers are accountable to the Conference for the exercise of their ministry and for the execution of the Conference's vision and will. At the same time they are accounted for by the Conference in that the Conference is committed to deploying them all appropriately and to providing them with the resources and support necessary for them to fulfil their ministry."

(From 'Ministry in the Methodist Church' 2021 para 7.4.2.4 which in turn quotes 'Releasing Ministers for Ministry' 2002 para 4.2)

- 6 There is therefore a mutual relationship between, on the one hand, ministers, both individually and corporately, and, on the other, the Conference and those individuals and bodies that represent it. It is a mutual relationship of pastoral care and oversight or, in more general terms, support and accountability. These need to be held together in tension. If they are, the result is very enriching both for ministers and for the wider Church.
- 7 What has begun to emerge in recent years is the recognition of an overall framework of support and accountability for ministers and for those who have responsibilities towards them within the Church. Within that overall framework a particular suite of programmes or set of tools is being developed:
 - the Handbook for Methodist Ministers;
 - the Reflective Supervision Policy;
 - the Ministerial Development Review; and
 - the Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers.
- 8 These four items differ from each other in kind, and serve different purposes. They are not, though, intended to be taken in isolation, still less to tie ~~create a mountain of~~ boulders around the necks of individuals or to treat all ministers as if they were in the active work and stationed in 'regular' circuit appointments. Instead, they are meant to be complementary, and supportive of one another. They are built on a foundation of the strong covenant relationship that shapes ordained ministry within Methodism. From them, an holistic programme can be created for each presbyter and deacon which takes into account their particular order of ministry, whether they are in the active work or supernumerary (retired), and the type of appointment in which they serve.
- 9 The first three in that list of programmes and how they fit together is described in more detail in an Appendix to Section B of the material following this report. What follows deals with the fourth, the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers*. It is based on the Competencies for Ministry previously adopted by the Conference, and it goes on to develop a series of commitments and expectations for both ministers and those who relate to them and, in particular, bear responsibility towards them, in the life of the Church.
- 10 First there is a series of **Commitments concerning Ministry**. These are a development of a model found in the "Resolutions on Pastoral Work" which were adopted by the 1971 Conference (and can be found in Book V Part 5 on page 767 of Volume 2 of the 2021 edition of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church [CPD]*). Taken together, the 1971 Resolutions are now designated as an historic text which in turn stands in line of succession from "The Twelve Rules of a Helper" of 1753 and the "Liverpool Minutes" of 1820 (which can be found in Volume 1 of CPD pages 77 and 79 respectively).
- 11 The intention is that these Commitments be made formally first in the Conference (hence they are set out in the form of "Resolutions"). There are three sets of them. One is for the Presbyteral Session of the Conference, to enable presbyters to make commitments to the Conference and the wider Connexion about the ways in which they exercise their ministry. The second is for the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order, to enable deacons to do the equivalent about their ministry. The third is for the Representative Session of the Conference to enable

representatives of the Methodist Church (be they lay or ordained) to make commitments about the ways in which they treat presbyters and deacons on behalf of the Church.

- 12 Where appropriate, the Commitments might also be used in formal meetings of other bodies in the life of the Church that lie under the jurisdiction of the Conference, such as Presbyteral Synods, Area Meetings of the Methodist Diaconal Order, Representative sessions of Synods, Circuit Meetings and Church Councils.
- 13 Flowing from the each of the Commitments is a series of **Expectations**. In each of the nine sections, some of the Expectations relate to ministers, their character and their practice of ministry. Others relate to those (be they lay or ordained) who represent the Methodist Church and bear some responsibility on its behalf in dealing with ministers locally, in Circuits, in Districts or connexionally. As such, the latter are not meant to be exhaustive outworkings of the general discipleship which flows from the relationship with God renewed in the annual Covenant Service, but rather a specific focusing of them with regard to the reception and treatment of ministers.
- 14 Moreover, all of the Expectations which flow from the Commitments in the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers* are meant to help the various parties to discern things clearly as they engage in processes that involve self-examination, the exercise of oversight and accountability, or the provision of support. As such some of the Expectations might be used on their own for a particular purpose or to address a particular situation. At other times they might provide reminders of prompts for the processes of Reflective Supervision and Ministerial Development Review. The *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers* is not intended to provide an alternative process to those. All three are complementary to each other.
- 15 The Commitments and Expectations do not of themselves constitute a formal Code of Conduct. The result of various consultations across the Connexion mandated by the Conference in recent years has led to the conclusion that a detailed code of conduct against which discipline can be exercised is not the way in which Methodists have ever done things, or wish to do things. Rather, policies, standards, guidelines and requirements are created from time to time to deal with particular issues. These are to be found in the resolutions passed by the Conference on those issues, and in the Standing Orders and other material to be found in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*. It has always been the case that any clear breach of them could be the grounds for a complaint or a charge in a discipline process. If it were ever decided that further standards need to be articulated or that requirements are lacking in some area, suitable resolutions could be brought to the Conference for adoption.¹
- 16 Like the promises made in the general Covenant Service in *The Methodist Worship Book*, the Baptism and Confirmation services, and in the acts of reception into Full Connexion and services of ordination, the Commitments are promises made in response to the gracious promises of God that we intend to keep and, by God's grace, will be enabled to keep. The Expectations that flow from those Commitments show that the first aim of support and accountability in this covenant relationship is to enable flourishing amongst both ministers and the wider church, and to avoid things that prevent that flourishing. As such they are aspirational, not in the sense of being wishful thinking but in that of articulating goals and intentions.
- 17 What the Commitments and Expectations in the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers* do is bring all the policies, standards, guidelines and requirements about the behaviour and treatment of ministers together in a clear framework. One potential effect of that,

¹ The policies, standards, guidelines and requirements that already exist can be found listed in Appendix 3 to Section B of this report, *Index of Existing Guidelines and Standards*. That Appendix, along with the soon to be published *Handbook for Methodist Ministers*, also contains some material about the terms and conditions of service and the expectations which the relevant parties to the covenant relationship between the Church, represented by the Conference on the one hand, and its ministers on the other may properly have of each other.

amongst many benefits, would be that any breach of them would clearly be the grounds for a grievance or complaint, or a charge under Standing Order 1130(3), section (ii) in particular.

SO 1130(3) *For the purposes of this Part, a charge is an allegation that the respondent:*

- (i) has committed a serious breach of the discipline of the Church as contained in the 1976 Act, the Deed of Union, the Model Trusts or Standing Orders;*
- (ii) has shown serious disregard of a resolution of the Conference or the usage of the Church as generally understood;*
- (iii) has or might have seriously impaired the mission, witness or integrity of the Church by his or her words, acts or omissions (including words, acts or omissions in situations of confidentiality or pastoral care), having regard to his or her office or standing in relation to the Church.*

18 *The Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers: Commitments and Expectations* therefore meets the concerns raised in the Past Cases Review in a way that is consonant with the Methodist Church's traditional understandings and practices. It does so in a way that recognises the responsibilities of ministers towards the church, and of the members of the church towards its ministers. Together with the complementary processes of Reflective Supervision and Ministerial Development Review and the information provided through the Handbook for Methodist Ministers² the Commitments and Expectations set out a framework of support and accountability that will enable the covenant relationship between the Conference and those who represent it in the wider Church on the one hand, and the Conference's ministers on the other to flourish. They encourage and enable people to bear one another's burdens and care for each other in these matters. Together, they are practical expressions of 'watching over one another in love'.

PART B: RENEWING FULL CONNEXION: COMMITMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In making these commitments and affirming these expectations we seek by the grace of God to renew the covenant relationship between the members, officers, institutions, committees and Conference of the Methodist Church on the one hand, and its ministers, both presbyters and deacons, on the other.

In doing so, we seek to respond to the encouragement and challenge to be found in the following extracts from chapter 4 of the Letter to the Ephesians.³

¹ I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit...

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift...

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ....

¹⁵ Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

² To be published in the connexional year 2022/23.

³ New Revised Standard Version.

It is a mutual relationship, in which all parties have a part to play that is of equal importance and value. All Christians are called to be members of the Church engaging in worship and mission as disciples. Their discipleship is focused in various callings according to the circumstances of their lives and the situations in which they find themselves. The ordained ministries of presbyters and deacons are but two particular forms of that focusing.

It is a mutual relationship of service. Presbyters and deacons are called to fulfil their office on behalf of the Church and in the church and the world by serving the church and the world and leading them in worship and mission. The Church in turn serves them by setting them free from other concerns and providing them with the resources necessary to do it.

It is therefore a mutual relationship of supporting and caring for each other, bearing each other's burdens, guiding one another and holding each other to account, and in that sense watching over one another in love.

To this end, we are asked to make the appropriate Commitments and affirm the Expectations, and to support each other in doing so and in reflecting together on them all.

2. COMMITMENTS

These Commitments are to be made in the Representative and Presbyteral Sessions of the Conference and the Conference Diaconal Committee as relevant, and may also be made in other local and connexional meetings as appropriate.

2.1 MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

As members of the Church, we remember that ministers (both presbyters and deacons) may be in the active work or supernumerary (retired), and that they may exercise their ministry in many different types of appointment in which they are appointed or permitted to serve. All however have been received into full connexion with the Conference in a covenant relationship, and the Conference has authorised their ordination. The Conference's decision that they are suitable to be received into Full Connexion is echoed in the shout of the people present at the ordination service that "They are worthy!".

Just as the ministers believe that they are called by God to minister, so the Conference believes that it is called by God, and on behalf of the whole Church it commits itself to accept the offering of their ministries, and to nurture, guide and support them in them. As members of the church and representatives of the Conference we play our parts in maintaining that covenant relationship as we exercise our particular responsibilities towards ministers in our various ways.

As expressions of that commitment, we resolve:

1. To receive the gifts and graces of particular presbyters and deacons (in circuit and other appointments) and to listen, consider and, as appropriate, enable those ministers to develop them and flourish in a variety of expressions of ministry.
2. To work collaboratively with ministers in Local Church, Circuit, District or other bodies of the Methodist Church, 'watching over one another in love' in a covenantal relationship to ensure that they and we are worthy representatives of Christ and the Methodist Church.
3. To provide time, opportunity, and appropriate encouragement and resources for the spiritual development of Methodist ministers and to allow them to support and guide us in responding to God's call to holiness in prayer, worship, lifestyle and action.
4. To find ways of building the resilience of Methodist ministers and members to face the stresses and strains and changing demands of their various ministries and discipleship, including providing the necessary pastoral support for the wellbeing of ministers and their households.
5. To work to change cultures in the Church and support ministers as appropriate to the type of their appointment in (a) implementing the Church's policies and requirements on such as

safeguarding; equality, diversity and inclusion; bullying and harassment; and pastoral practice, and (b) in maintaining in their relationships and responsibilities boundaries between those matters that are personal and those that are connected to their work as a minister.

6. To support ministers and share with them in developing strategic vision, acquiring practical tools and exercising evangelistic, prophetic and socially engaged ministries and mission in the world.
7. To promote and embody the culture of shared leadership in which ministers and lay people collaborate in playing appropriate and complementary roles, and in which people are enabled where necessary to live with contradictory convictions.
8. To embody and encourage a culture of lifelong learning and continuing theological reflection amongst all the Methodist people, including presbyters and deacons, not least by ensuring that time and resources are available for it.
9. To help ensure that ministers are trained, equipped and supported so that they understand and, where appropriate, practise the relevant and necessary communication skills to serve the present age, including those relating to social media and digital technology.

2.2 PRESBYTERS

As presbyters, we remember that we have been received into full connexion with the Methodist Conference in a covenant relationship and have been ordained in God's name and received the charge

*to preach by word and deed the Gospel of God's grace;
to declare God's forgiveness of sins to all who are penitent;
to baptize, to confirm and to preside at the celebration of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood; to lead God's people in worship, prayer and service;
to minister Christ's love and compassion;
to serve others, in whom you serve the Lord himself.*

As part of the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers* we renew our ordination promises each year and are asked to respond to the questions:

*Does each of us continue faithfully to discharge the obligations laid upon us by the ministry we have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the grace of God?
Do we continue to believe and preach our doctrines and observe and administer our discipline?*

As expressions of those commitments, whether in the active work or supernumerary and irrespective of the type of appointment to which we are appointed or in which we are authorised to serve, or the place where we are permitted to reside, we resolve afresh:

1. To seek to fulfil our continuing calling and commitment and, insofar as we are permitted and able, the charge we received at ordination.
2. To share with colleagues, lay and ordained, in watching over one another in love, exercising and accepting oversight, supervision and support of our conduct as representatives of the Methodist Church.
3. To nurture our relationship with God and constantly seek holiness in worship, prayer, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, lifestyle and action.
4. To care for ourselves, seeking to understand our own personalities and allowing our characters to be formed by engaging with our limitations and vulnerabilities and recognising our dependence on and experience of grace.
5. To show unfailing love towards others both in relationships that are formal or professional and in those that are personal or private; to exercise caution in maintaining appropriate boundaries and our use of power particularly where people are marginalised, vulnerable or distressed; and to

abide by all the Church's standards and guidelines concerning safeguarding; equality, diversity and inclusion; harassment and bullying; confidentiality; intimacy and sexuality.

6. To lead God's people in mission in and to the world by sharing with Methodists and where possible with ecumenical partners and others in informed theological reflection about God and the world; to share with others in the work of evangelism, in engagement with social issues in ways that demonstrate Christ's justice and compassion, and in prophetic ministry in which God's steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace are combined.
7. To lead people in both humility and confidence by sharing with them in responding and being accountable to God's call and the discipline of the Church; to work collaboratively with lay and ordained colleagues in ways which encourage and enable their various gifts to flourish and which respect and seek to hold together their differing and even contradictory convictions.
8. To engage in lifelong learning and theological reflection, with regular and intentional study of the Bible and Christian faith, and of issues in society and the world.
9. To dedicate ourselves to constantly learning how both to hear and to speak with clarity and passion about people's experience of life and the world, and also about God and the good news of Christ in relation to those experiences; to strive to use the words, language, images and actions that are appropriate for each audience; and to seek to ensure that we abide by the Church's guidance on the use of social and other media.

2.3 DEACONS

As deacons, we remember that we have been received into Full Connexion with the Methodist Conference in a covenant relationship which includes membership of a dispersed religious order, the Methodist Diaconal Order, and have been ordained in God's name and received the charge

*to assist God's people in worship and prayer;
to hold before them the needs and concerns of the world;
to minister Christ's love and compassion;
to visit and support the sick and the suffering;
to seek out the lost and the lonely;
and to help those you serve to offer their lives to God.⁴*

As part of the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers* we renew our ordination promises each year and are each asked to respond to the questions

*Do you continue to believe that God has called you to be a Deacon in the universal Church?
Do you continue to accept the Holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord?
Do you continue to believe the doctrines of the Christian faith as this Church has received them?
Do you continue to accept the discipline of this Church, working together with your brothers and sisters in the church?
Will you continue to be faithful in worship, in prayer, in the reading of the Holy Scriptures and in those studies which will equip you for ministry?*

As expressions of those commitments, whether in the active work or supernumerary and irrespective of the type of appointment to which we are appointed or in which we are authorised to serve, or the place where we are permitted to reside, we resolve afresh:

1. To seek to fulfil our continuing calling and commitment and, insofar as we are permitted and able, the charge we received at ordination.

⁴ MWB Ordination of Deacons p. 317. The Conference in 2019 amended a sentence in the third paragraph of the Introduction to the Ordination Services (MWB p. 297) to read "Deacons are ordained to a ministry of witness and service and pastoral care and seek to equip God's people for witness and service in the world."

2. To share with colleagues, lay and ordained, in watching over one another in love, exercising and accepting oversight, supervision and support of our conduct as representatives of the Methodist Church.
3. To nurture our relationship with God and constantly seek holiness by following the Order's Rule of Life and in worship, prayer, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, lifestyle and action.
4. To care for ourselves, seeking to understand our own personalities and allowing our characters to be formed by engaging with our limitations and vulnerabilities and recognising our dependence on and experience of grace.
5. To show unfailing love towards others both in relationships that are formal or professional and in those that are personal or private; to exercise caution in maintaining appropriate boundaries and our use of power particularly where people are marginalised, vulnerable or distressed; and to abide by all the Church's standards and guidelines concerning safeguarding; equality, diversity and inclusion; harassment and bullying; confidentiality; intimacy and sexuality.
6. To lead God's people in mission in and to the world by sharing with Methodists and where possible with ecumenical partners and others in informed theological reflection about God and the world; to share with others in the work of evangelism, in engagement with social issues in ways that demonstrate Christ's justice and compassion, and in prophetic ministry in which God's steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace are combined.
7. To lead people in both humility and confidence by sharing with them in responding and being accountable to God's call and the discipline of the Church; to work collaboratively with lay and ordained colleagues in ways which encourage and enable their various gifts to flourish and which respect and seek to hold together their differing and even contradictory convictions.
8. To engage in lifelong learning and theological reflection, with regular and intentional study of the Bible and Christian faith, and of issues in society and the world.
9. To dedicate ourselves to constantly learning how both to hear and to speak with clarity and passion about people's experience of life and the world and about God, and also about the good news of Christ in relation to those experiences; to strive to use words, language, images and actions that are appropriate for each audience; and to seek to ensure that we abide by the Church's guidance on the use of social and other media.

3. EXPECTATIONS

These Expectations set out standards and provide tools for discernment with regard to how ministers fulfil their office, and how they are treated by others within and on behalf of the Church. Like the Commitments, they follow the Headings of the Selection Criteria for Ministry approved by the Conference. The various sub-sections may best be used separately as occasion makes them appropriate.

3.1 VOCATION (CALL AND COMMITMENT)⁵

'It is the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of Christian ministry depends upon the call of God'.⁶ Throughout the process of candidating and training, people are tested on their call and asked if they remain persuaded that God has called them to ordained ministry in the Church. That call to ordained ministry is a particular expression of the vocation to discipleship which is shared by all members of the Church. Those ordained as ministers 'focus, express, and enable the ministry of the whole people of God'.⁷ Ministers (both presbyters and deacons) are people who witness to a sense of a distinct call to serve in the ministry to which they are ordained. They are aware of the need continually to ask to what they are being called and to test the

⁵ The Retreat Association, of which the Methodist Church is a member, provide details on finding spiritual directors, see www.retreats.org.uk.

⁶ Deed of Union clause 4.

⁷ *What is a Presbyter?* paragraph 4.

development of their call with others in the Church. They live with a conviction that for them the call to be a presbyter or deacon is part of, and indispensable to, the call to holiness which is common to all disciples but which finds different expression in each; this vocation however is not individualistic but is tested and affirmed by the community of disciples. All these ministers, whatever the nature or type of their appointment, therefore seek to discern their developing vocation (eg at times of stationing) in dialogue with the Church and its processes.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- receive the gifts and graces of particular ministers (in circuit or other appointments);
- balance their apparent skills with the apparent needs of the Church;
- have discussions with ministers about their calling and commitment to ordained ministry;
- show a commitment to enabling them to grow and develop their gifts and graces in a variety of expressions of ministry.

Expectations of ministers

The Church expects that you will:

- speak of your sense of call when appropriate;
- share the challenges of living the life of a disciple and a minister;
- explore with others (eg with minister exercising oversight, supervisor, spiritual director, lay and ordained colleagues) how your vocational calling has changed or developed;
- show a commitment to helping people worship God and share in God's mission in the world.

3.2 VOCATION (MINISTRY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN GREAT BRITAIN)

Whilst the Methodist Church ordains 'not to a denomination, but to the presbyterate and diaconate of the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church', Methodist ministers (both presbyters and deacons) exercise ministry within and as representatives of the Methodist Church in Britain. As such all ministers, including those who exercise oversight over their peers, are equally accountable to the Conference.

This representative ministry is conducted in collaboration with others and in partnership with Christians of other denominations with whom the Methodist Church in Britain is committed to work for a fuller expression of God-given unity.

Deacons are people whose calling is to focus a ministry of witness and service on behalf of the whole Church by enabling the ministry of others. They are required to live according to the Diaconal Order's Rule of Life.

Presbyters are called to a "principal and directing part" in the life of the Church through the ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral responsibility.

All ministers are called to work with colleagues from other denominations in a way which honours the others' positions whilst maintaining their own identity as Methodist.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- receive, own and support the ministry of the ministers to whom you are connected, (whether in circuit or other types of appointment, and whether in the active work or supernumerary);
- work collaboratively with ministers, 'watching over one another in love' in a covenantal rather than an employer/employee relationship;
- be aware of any unhealthy power imbalances affecting collaborative working between all members, lay and ordained; and take appropriate steps to rectify these where they occur;
- work alongside Methodist ministers in engaging with other partners in projects with mission opportunities.

Expectations of ministers

The Church expects that you will:

- be a representative of the Methodist Church in your particular type of appointment;
- work collaboratively and share leadership with other members of the Church (presbyters and deacons, lay officers and lay members);
- give and receive oversight ('watching over one another in love') with other ministers and lay people;
- be accountable for your conduct as a representative of the Methodist Church and recognise the power inherent in the office;
- demonstrate respect for the significance and integrity of the other order of ministry, and of lay officers and members.

3.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Presbyters and deacons are first and foremost people of prayer and spirituality. Presbyters and deacons commit themselves at ordination to 'be faithful in worship, in prayer, [and] in the reading of the Holy Scriptures.'⁸ It is recognised that there are diverse ways in which spirituality can be expressed and nurtured.

Ministers need to nurture a spiritual life that is authentic and disciplined and which is based on a confidence in God's love for them and a sense of the call to holiness which embodies prayer and worship in lifestyle and action. This spiritual life will be manifest in regular engagement with the means of grace in private devotion and in the life of the worshipping community. As for all Methodist disciples, this will include participation in public worship, regular communion, and prayer and Bible study in small groups. Ministers need to be those who are able to receive as well as to give in worship, fellowship, pastoral care, and mission.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- provide time, opportunity, and appropriate encouragement and resources for the spiritual development of ministers, recognising the breadth of spirituality found among them and the different types of appointment that they fulfil;
- seek to enrich the spiritual lives of the members of the Church and others;
- encourage and enable ministers to seek out opportunities for prayer and worship, both within and beyond the Methodist Church, which will nourish their relationship with God;
- allow ministers and others to support you, "to watch over you in love" in your relationship with God;
- respond to the call to holiness in prayer, worship, lifestyle and action;
- embody in yourself and encourage ministers in a commitment to *Our Calling*.

Expectation of ministers

The Church expects that you will:

- be faithful in worship, in prayer and in the reading of the Holy Scriptures;
- nurture your own and others spirituality;
- attend worship when you are not leading other people in worship;
- develop healthy supportive friendships;
- seek out those who offer oversight in regards to your relationship with God;
- respond to the call to holiness in prayer, worship, lifestyle and action;
- embody and encourage others in a commitment to *Our Calling*.

⁸ *Methodist Worship Book* pp. 303, 318.

3.4 PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

A New Testament model for ministry is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. No matter in what type of appointment ministers serve, or what type of personality or theological outlook they have, their life can be spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically demanding. As the Ordination service puts it 'This ministry will make great demands upon you.'⁹

Ministers therefore need to develop and to maintain the resources and traits of character to face these demands. Practically, as people for whom the Church has to a greater or lesser extent provided, presbyters and deacons conduct their own financial affairs with probity and appropriate transparency, live modestly and, so far as their means allow, embody the generosity of Christ to others. As representative people they are duty bound to live simply and demonstrate the care for the environment and conservation of the resources of the planet that expresses the Church's concern for the integrity of creation.

More generally, ministers need to understand their own limitations and vulnerability, and recognise their dependence on and experience of grace. They need to care for themselves, and to have the capacity to engage with and to work on areas of perceived weakness. The formation of their character in these matters is a continuing process throughout their life and ministry, not least through living and working within the Church's policy that all ministers should operate under a programme of reflective supervision.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- seek to help build the resilience of Methodist ministers and fellow disciples to face the changing demands and pressures of ministry and discipleship;
- offer pastoral support for the wellbeing of ministers and their households;
- seek to reduce the pressures on Methodist ministers in order that they may fulfil their calling;
- recognise that supernumerary ministers continue to be ministers, and enable them to exercise their ministry in appropriate ways within the limits of what they can offer;
- help to ensure that ministers in the active work who are required to live in property provided by the Church are housed in manses that are appropriate to their needs and those of their families, and that their manses and equipment are up to standard and well maintained;
- be aware of the Methodist Church's policies and practices of Reflective Supervision, Ministerial Development Reviews, Training, Continuing Development in Ministry, and Safeguarding.

Expectations of ministers

The Church expects that you will:

- strive to flourish in ministry by practising self-care;
- if in the active work, maintain reasonable working hours,¹⁰ and take regular days off and holidays, including quarter days as laid out in the current guidance;
- if in the active work or otherwise required to do so, meet regularly with a supervisor, and make effective use of the space to reflect on ministry with a view to improving your practice;
- use wisely the gift of any sabbatical, study days or retreats whilst acknowledging the benefits and difficulties caused by accepting them;
- take good care of your health, including taking proper time for physical exercise;
- seek advice, counsel, treatment and rest when stressed or unwell;
- seek to live within your means, keep accurate records of all receipts of gifts or other monies in addition to your stipend, salary, or pension, and abide by the Church's policies in relation to occasional fees, gifts, and gratuities;
- work with local stewards to take care of the manse with which you have been provided.

⁹ *Methodist Worship Book* pp. 302, 317.

¹⁰ CPD Book VII Guidance, Part 3

3.5 BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

All ministry is relational. So far as those who are ordained are concerned, both presbyters and deacons are called to have 'unfailing love'¹¹ for those amongst whom they minister. Their conduct towards them should be that of loving servants who are called to live among those whom they may find it easy or difficult to like. As all human relationships have dimensions of power and vulnerability, they should be alert to these and cautious of any words or actions that could be interpreted as an abuse of their power. They therefore need to be conversant with and to advocate the Church's policies and practices in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. They also need to be conversant with and live openly in accord with the policies concerning equality, diversity, and inclusion¹²; and with the statements and guidance regarding principles of good relating, cohabitation and the understanding of marriage, including same-sex marriage.¹³ The expectation that all ministers will seek to live in accordance with the church's policies and statements on marriage, family life, and other relationships applies to their personal as well as their public life. In this aspect and more generally presbyters and deacons should seek and be encouraged to recognise that as well as their calling to have 'unfailing love' for those amongst whom they minister, they all have other vocations (eg to be spouses or partners, parents, children, siblings, friends, or neighbours) and are called prayerfully to balance their responsibilities to those close to them with the demands of their ministry in and on behalf of the Church.

No matter what the type or circumstances of their appointments, all ministers should therefore model good, wholesome, and loving relationships.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- exercise your responsibilities under the covenant relationship towards those ministers for whom you care;
- ensure that ministers feel valued and supported whilst they are exercising the Church's care for others;
- support ministers in implementing the Church's policies and requirements on such as safeguarding; equality, diversity and inclusion; bullying and harassment; and pastoral practice;
- intervene and offer support where Methodist ministers believe that they experience bullying, discriminatory, or belittling behaviour;
- offer appropriate help and support to Methodist ministers (as identified in our policies and practices) before their wellbeing and mental health is affected;
- recognise and help others recognise that as well as being a place of work the manse is primarily a home where privacy is to be respected;
- support ministers to maintain a balance between their personal relationships and responsibilities and those connected with their work as a minister.

Expectations of ministers

The church expects that you will:

- exercise 'unfailing love' towards others in professional or public relationships;
- exercise 'unfailing love' in personal or private relationships;
- balance your responsibilities to those close to you with the demands of ministry;
- follow the stipulations in the Church's policies on bullying and harassment, safeguarding¹⁴ and on equality, diversity, and inclusion;

¹¹ MWB Ordination of Presbyters para 16 p. 306; Ordination of Deacons para 16 p. 321

¹² As set out in the *Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church* adopted by the Conference in 2021 (Item 56 in the 2021 Agenda).

¹³ As adopted by the Conference in 2021 following the report to the Conference in 2019 "God in Love Unites Us" and the report to the Conference in 2021 "Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions"; and from 2021 set out in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Book VII Part 10 Marriage and Relationships: Good Relating, Cohabitation and Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage*.

¹⁴ See Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policiesprocedure-and-information/policies-and-guidance/>

- conduct all pastoral work in accordance with the Church's directions and guidance¹⁵ and keep accurate and meaningful records of pastoral visits and encounters¹⁶;
- identify and maintain appropriate boundaries in pastoral relationships and refer to Reflective Supervision or a minister in oversight any relationship that might threaten to cross the boundaries of professional, pastoral care;
- discuss with your minister in oversight serious difficulties in or likely breakup of personal relationships;
- be willing to admit to being vulnerable at times and seek help from the Church family.

3.6 THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY IN GOD'S WORLD

Ministers are called to lead God's people in mission to the world. They are those in whom particular gifts have been identified which contribute to the fulfilling of the mission of the Church. Their lives are shaped by the calling of the Church to worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism and by seeking to reflect theologically on the Church's vocation in the context of the 21st century.

Theological reflection is therefore central to the life of presbyters and deacons. They will seek to be informed about the world and to ask where God is at work. In this, their opinions should be informed by the use of reliable and authoritative media. It is wholly inappropriate for Methodist ministers to be members of any movements that implicitly or explicitly deny the equality of all God's children.

All ministers (whether in circuit or other appointments or without appointment and in all aspects of their ministry) are called to work ecumenically, where possible, to reflect the Methodist Church's understanding of the catholicity of the Church as God's instrument of mission in the world. Within a broad understanding of what it means to be God's people in this place and time, they will develop their own theological and other interests and aim to contribute to the life and witness of the Methodist Church and the universal church in particular ways, proclaiming the good news of God's love in ways that are appropriate to their context.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- accept the support, leadership and encouragement of ministers to exercise evangelistic, prophetic and socially engaged ministries and mission in the world;
- support, advise, and empower Methodist ministers to engage in a prophetic ministry in the Church and in the world, and to work with you and others in furthering God's mission for human flourishing and the wellbeing of creation;
- engage with ministers in theological reflection on the pressing issues of our times.

Expectations of ministers

The church expects that you will:

- lead God's people in mission to the world;
- discern with others where God is at work;
- ensure the Church's work is outward facing, engaging with both God and the world in worship and practical action;
- reflect in your own interests and commitments the Church's mission to the world;
- exercise a prophetic ministry in which God's steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace are combined¹⁷;
- engage with social issues in ways that make clear Christ's way of justice and compassion;

¹⁵ eg see Conference reports, 'With Integrity and Skill' and 'Positive Working Together.'

¹⁶ See Code of Safer Working Practice with Adults in Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policies-procedure-and-information/policies-and-guidance/>

¹⁷ For the last of these, see Psalm 85:10

- avoid denigrating the opinions or motivations of others, whilst being free to hold and to express party political views;
- speak respectfully of Christians of other denominations and of members of other faith communities;
- seek to develop partnerships in mission with members of other churches working with the guidance of connexional and district officers as and when appropriate.

3.7 LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Presbyters have ‘a principal and directing part in [the] great duties [of the Church]’.¹⁸ Deacons ‘in many different contexts ... embody, proclaim and point to the transforming love of Christ and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling’.¹⁸

Both presbyters and deacons are called to ‘accept our discipline and work together with... sisters and brothers in the Church’.¹⁹ This requires an appropriate degree of both humility and confidence in the way in which leadership is exercised. Ministers therefore need to have an ability to work with others in a variety of ways. They should work collaboratively with their lay and ordained colleagues in the leadership of churches, circuits, or other bodies to which they are stationed. They should be able to let others flourish and to delegate to them when appropriate. At other times they will find themselves required to act decisively on the part of the church, circuit, or other body. To do this they will need to have an appropriate understanding of their own authority. The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church orders, regulates, and guides the work of those who exercise leadership in the life of the Church and all presbyters and deacons are expected to be familiar with its contents.

The covenant relationship is one in which presbyters and deacons are called to represent the Conference within and beyond the Church. Particularly in the public arena, they should uphold the decisions of the Conference and express personal disagreement with those decisions in a manner which is collegial and respectful of the Conference and its officers, demonstrating ‘a willingness to work with a dynamic tension of diversity, recognising that openness does not mean that ‘anything goes’ but is a desire to discern God’s will in and for the other and the Church.’²⁰

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- promote and embody the culture of shared leadership in which ministers and lay people play appropriate roles;
- support ministers in encouraging and enabling participation;
- support ministers when circumstances have required that they act decisively, even if such decisions may be judged by some to be ill-advised;
- help ministers to enable people to live where necessary with contradictory convictions.

Expectations of ministers

The church expects that you will:

- lead whilst collaborating with others;
- encourage participation, shared responsibility and learn from feedback;
- delegate tasks to others according to their gifts and graces;
- ensure that meetings in the life of the Church are properly constituted, effectively administered, and functionally efficient;
- consult with and act in accordance with the relevant Standing Orders, Regulations and Guidance contained in CPD, and the decisions of the Conference and its officers;
- enable people to live, when necessary, with contradictory convictions;

¹⁸ Deed of Union clause 4.

¹⁹ Conference *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate* para 2.2.1 ¹⁹ MWB pp. 303, 318.

²⁰ Conference 2006 *Living with Contradictory Convictions*.

- chair and contribute to meetings in ways which clearly encourage all present to express opinions and model respectful listening;
- encourage those with whom you share in ministry to help to implement the decisions of the Conference.

3.8 LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

Presbyters and deacons are required to undertake duties on behalf of the Church in which it is essential that they can explicitly and lucidly articulate the doctrines of the Christian faith to those who have received the gospel and to those who are yet to receive it. Their practice of ministry must also be informed by an understanding of the great truths of the Faith and an ability to reflect theologically using a range of resources.

Presbyters and deacons should therefore see themselves as lifelong learners who are constantly engaged in theological reflection. Their regular life should include dedicated times of study, engagement with Scripture and theological texts, and participation in study activities. It is recommended that all ministers identify their own theological interests and pursue them.

Presbyters and deacons should also explore and develop their interests in other avenues of knowledge, and seek to engage with a range of cultural pursuits and activities.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The Church expects that you will:

- embody and encourage a culture of lifelong learning and continuing theological reflection amongst all the Methodist people, including presbyters and deacons;
- provide Methodist ministers, in particular, with the necessary time and resources so that they may actively pursue theological and other interests;
- encourage ministers to make theological study a priority;
- support ministers and others in engaging in the apologetic task;
- ensure that ministers maintain their general reading and engagement with cultural activities.

Expectations of ministers

The church expects that you will:

- engage in lifelong learning and theological reflection;
- maintain habits of study and Bible reading;
- be aware of the resources of the Church in developing skills of theological reflection;
- engage with particular areas of theological reflection;
- engage with general reading and other media;
- participate in the study opportunities offered by the Circuit, District, and Connexion.

3.9 COMMUNICATION

Much of ministry is concerned with speaking about God and, at times, with all humility in the name of God to people within and outside the Church. It also involves being able to speak with people, listening and seeking to help them to articulate their lives and their experience of the world around them. To do this and at the same time articulate the truths of the Christian faith demands the skills of communication. Ministers are those who are constantly learning how to hear and speak with clarity and passion about the Good News of Christ.

Ministers therefore need to be aware of the various methods of communication that are available to them and of the importance of using appropriate methods to speak to people with different learning styles and abilities. They need to be alert to cultural differences and to those who do not find written or spoken English easy. They should also be aware of the opportunities and the perils of digital technology and social media and be conversant with and careful about using modern methods of communication.

Above all, ministers should remember that whenever they communicate they do so as those who represent Christ in the name of the Methodist Church and therefore be careful about what they say, the words that they use to say it, and how it might be repeated and interpreted.

Expectations of members, officers and committees of the Church

The church expects that you will:

- help to train, equip and support ministers so that they understand and, where appropriate, practise the relevant and necessary communication skills to serve the present age, including those relating to social media and digital technology;
- encourage the Methodist people and ministers in particular to speak of God in God's world;
- harness the communication skills of others to enable better communications;
- work with ministers, and lay officers to improve our communications with all generations;
- be prepared to raise questions about other people's, including ministers', use of languages, images and other forms of communication – on and offline.

Expectations of ministers

The church expects that you will:

- constantly seek to improve your communication skills;
- obtain regular feedback on your preaching and other forms of public communication;
- ensure that the words, language, images and actions you use to communicate are appropriate to each particular audience;
- avoid the intentional use of language or imagery that could be found offensive;
- abide by the Church's guidance on the use of social media and generally ensure that your use of information technology and social media is competent and appropriate;
- consider carefully how you respond to any printed, broadcast, or Internet material that has gratuitously sexual or violent content.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

19/1. The Conference received the Report.

19/2. The Conference adopted section 1, 2 and 3 of Part B with paragraphs 2, 24, and 25 from Appendix 1 inserted into section 1 before the paragraph beginning "It is therefore a mutual relationship of caring for each other..." and directed that they be published as Book IV, Part 6 of CPD.

19/3. The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee to review relevant Standing Orders in the light of this report and to bring draft amendments to the Conference of 2023.

19/4. The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring a proposal relating to the inclusion and positioning of Book V, Part 5 (Resolutions on the Pastoral Work) to the Conference of 2023.

19/5. The Conference resolved that the commitments as proposed in paragraph 11 be made annually at the Methodist Diaconal Order Convocation, the Presbyteral Session of the Conference and the Representative Session of the Conference, beginning in 2023, and thereafter commended for use across the Connexion.

APPENDIX 1 THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTERS: BACKGROUND

1. This Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers is grounded in the Conference Statement *Ministry in the Methodist Church* adopted in 2021, and in the *Principles of Presbyteral Ministry* set out in Standing Order 700, and the *Principles of*

Diaconal Ministry set out in Standing Order 701. In particular, Standing Order 700(2) and 701(2) state that

By receiving persons into full connexion as Methodist presbyters/deacons the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them in which they are held accountable by the church in respect of their presbyteral/diaconal ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry. That covenant relationship arises within their existing relationship with the Church as members, which continues, and neither entry into it nor service within it has ever created or is intended to create, or does create, contractual relations.²¹

2. In this covenant relationship, both the Church and those who are ordained are committed to each other and accountable to each other within their ultimate commitment and accountability to God. That commitment and accountability is embodied both connexionally and locally. Just as a presbyter's or deacon's commitment to the Conference is embodied in the way that they serve people in their particular appointments, so the Conference's commitment to a presbyter or deacon is embodied in the way that they are used and treated by local churches and their representatives.
3. All Methodist presbyters and deacons who are ordained and in full connexion (irrespective of whether they are in the active work or supernumerary), are stationed under a common discipline. For those who are not supernumerary, stationing to circuit or other types of appointments is conducted in light of the overall needs and resources (lay and ordained) of the Church. In other words, there is a single process of stationing for all presbyters and all deacons respectively with appropriate and equivalent procedures for those serving in each of the various types of appointment. What is fundamental for them all is that each person stationed is a Methodist presbyter or deacon living and serving within the covenant relationship that constitutes being in full connexion with the Conference. That takes precedence over the different types of appointment in which they serve and their particular terms and conditions of service.
4. Stationing therefore requires that those whom the Conference ordains and receives into full connexion allow their own needs and gifts to be put into the context of the wider needs of the Kingdom. John Wesley told his helpers "Go always, not only to those who want (i.e. need) you, but to those who want (i.e. need) you most". He would also have wanted the Conference to "Send the ministers always, not only to those who need them, but to those who need them most".
5. Similarly, those who exercise office and bear responsibility in local churches, circuits, districts and connexional bodies need to allow their own needs and desires to be seen in the light of the wider needs of God's Kingdom. Within the covenant relationship they must support ministers and enable their particular gifts to flourish for the sake of that Kingdom and the wider Church.
6. The weight of maintaining the covenant relationship therefore does not fall on the ministers alone. All parties to a covenant make promises and commitments, and there needs to be a regular review of how they are being embodied in practice, to enable both presbyters and deacons on the one hand, and representatives of the various bodies and expressions of the Methodist Church on the other hand to express their accountability to God, to the Church, and to each other.
7. Ministers and others therefore need to reflect constantly how what we might term the "Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers" is working out in their situation. Such reflection should be marked by

²¹ SO 700(2)/701(2) as in 2022 edition of CPD, melded together here for ease.

- a common commitment to the requirements of the Kingdom;
- a respect for the perceived needs of both the presbyters and deacons respectively and of the situations requiring their ministry, and at the same time a critical engagement with them both; and
- a transparency about motives and all material factors affecting the process.

Process of Reflection

8. “Watching over one another in love” is the traditional hallmark of the Methodist experience and understanding of discipleship. It involves a free-will commitment to sharing in the discerning of God’s Spirit at work in the world through conferring with others, and a gracious offering of oneself to give and receive the fruits of that discernment so that all may grow in holiness (personal and social) and engage in worship and mission to the best of their ability.
9. In other words, ‘watching over one another in love’ is the Methodist way of exercising shared oversight. It begins in the promises and commitments made in baptism, confirmation and becoming a member of the Methodist Church. Its classic expression spiritually is in the Covenant Service. Its classic embodiment practically is in Class and Band meetings (and their modern equivalents), and in the Conference (and its subsidiary meetings in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts and the wider Connexion).
10. The process of conferring and discerning always has to be open to the Spirit bringing new insights and fresh revelations of truth. But it also has to begin from somewhere; and it then needs to check that any apparent new insights that emerge are of God. In this, the primary starting point and checking point has always been the Bible. That is why the holiness being overseen is often termed ‘scriptural’ holiness.
11. Early Methodism, as the name suggests, developed its own method of pursuing holiness in worship and mission. That method involved developing guidelines, and setting out aspirations and expectations, which applied the insights of scripture to the lives of the people. These were guidelines not in the sense of a legal code of commandments but of recommended standards for living and touchstones for reflection.
12. It is as if Wesley saw “watching over one another in love” as a means of grace. He defined ‘means of grace’ as “*outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to [human beings] preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace*”. He then immediately went on to quote the *Book of Common Prayer’s* phrase, “the means of grace and the hope of glory” before summarising the *Book of Common Prayer’s* definition of sacraments as “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same”²².
13. Predominant among this type of reflective material for the early Methodists were *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies* (which included the rules for the Class Meeting) (1743); and the *Rules of the Bands* (1738) and *Directions given to the Band Societies* (1744).

²² *Standard Sermons number XII* (number 16 in the more recent edition by Outler). In the same sermon Wesley identified the chief of these means of grace as prayer (individual and communal); searching the Scriptures (by reading, hearing and meditating on them); and receiving the Lord’s Supper (regularly, and as often as possible). In the Minutes of the 1744 Conference, Wesley added two further ones: fasting; and Christian Conference (which we have more recently termed Christian Conferring). These five things Wesley sometimes called the ‘Institutional Means of Grace’, in that he found scriptural warrant for them. But he also recognised other things which he called ‘Prudential Means of Grace’. These, by their very definition, could vary according to the people, contexts and situations concerned; but they were always directed towards “*watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God*”. They included following particular rules of life or engaging in particular acts of holy living.

14. Within the general calling of all the “people called Methodists” to “live by Rule”, there were focused callings and guidelines for those performing particular functions (e.g. “the Rules for Singing”) or fulfilling particular offices. Of particular relevance for our current concerns are the group of Anglican priests and lay preachers that Wesley began to gather around him as his itinerant “Helpers” or “Assistants”, and with whom he held Conference. Over the years, and particularly as Methodism began to develop from being a movement within the Church of England to being a Church (and then Churches) in its own right, this group gradually developed into an order of ministers.
15. In this process, Wesley’s *Twelve Rules of a Helper* (1753, being a revised version of the *Rules of an Assistant*, 1744) were very important, particularly in the Wesleyan tradition. They could be used as a set of tools to enable personal and shared reflection on the experience and practice of ministry.
16. Other Methodist traditions expressed this dynamic in their own ways. These came together with Methodist Union in 1932. Since then the important dynamic of “watching over one another in love” in their ministry, and in exercising accountability and receiving support for it, has been expressed by ordained presbyters through
 - staff meetings;
 - the response to the questions asked during a communion service at the Presbyteral Session of each District Synod (“Does each of us continue faithfully to discharge the obligations laid upon us by the ministry which we have received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God? Do we continue to believe and preach our doctrines and administer our discipline?”); and
 - the answer of each District in the Presbyteral Session of the Conference to the Annual Inquiry about the character and discipline of presbyters and presbyteral probationers. At the time of writing in 2020, a programme for the Reflective Supervision of all ministers (presbyters and deacons) in the active work is being introduced across the Connexion.
17. The whole process has been summed up in the Ordinal for Presbyters in the 1999 Methodist Worship Book. After outlining a number of tasks of presbyteral ministry under the heading “In God’s name you are to...” it goes on to say, “These things are your common duty and delight. In them you are to watch over one another in love.”
18. The Methodist Diaconal Order also has a clear (or specific) expectation and practice in these matters articulated in the sharing of a common rule of life. The declaration in the diaconal ordination service states that “You are to share fully in the life of your Order and to keep its discipline”. The sense of “watching over one another in love” is enacted in the area groups and through the Order’s Convocation. The annual inquiry as to the character and discipline of deacons and diaconal probationers is conducted through a rededication service at the Convocation, and assurances then given by the Warden of the Order on behalf of the Convocation to the Conference Diaconal Committee and, thereby, the Conference.
19. In recent years attention has been given to outlining the nature of the Offices or roles to which presbyters and deacons are respectively called; the values and characteristics of the ways in which they live out their calling; and the particular tasks of ministry that they undertake. This has led to identifying criteria of competence and standards of practice, so that they can be used by the Church and its ministers in the processes of their selection, training and formation, and above all in the processes of shared discernment of what God is calling both ministers and the wider church to be and do. As part of this, the 2003 Conference approved *Criteria for the Selection of Candidates for Ordained Ministry* which were revised by the 2016 Conference.

20. What is offered here is a tool to enable presbyters and deacons on the one hand, and, on the other, those representing the Church in local churches, circuits, districts or other connexional bodies who engage with them and bear responsibility towards them, to reflect on particular experiences or aspects of each individual's ministry. But because the Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers is a mutual relationship it also enables those people representing the Conference and the constituent bodies of the Methodist Church to reflect with the ministers on the ways in which the responsibilities of the Church towards its ministers are being fulfilled.
21. As noted earlier, the commitment to being 'watched over in love' is a key element in discipleship and ministry for all Methodists. Both ordained and lay are in their various ways participants in the programme *Our Calling*.
22. Much of the material offered here, however, refers to the exercise of ordained ministry. It applies to both presbyters and deacons in ways that are appropriate to each order of ministry. Moreover, it applies to people irrespective of the category of ministry or type of appointment in which they serve – again in ways which are appropriate to each. The covenant relationship between those who are ordained and in full connexion on the one hand and the Conference and its representatives on the other extends to more than those ministers in the active work. All ministers, therefore, whether in circuit or other types of appointment or in retirement would benefit from studying and using the material. The degree to which it applies to each minister, however, will be proportional to the level of ministry in which each is engaged. Similarly, the degree to which the points for reflection directed towards the Church apply to each individual or group who represent the Church locally or connexionally in dealing with ordained ministers will be proportional to the level of engagement which each is meant to have with ministers.
23. None of this will appear unfamiliar to the presbyter or deacon who has nurtured her or his vocation and been faithful in watching over and being watched over in love. *What is a Presbyter?* reminded the Church that ministers are expected to behave "with integrity, competence and according to the best standards of practice towards those to whom she or he ministers." The same is true of those who have to engage with or relate to presbyters or deacons. This material therefore reminds ministers and those who bear responsibility towards them of the exemplary standards of behaviour which befit their calling as representative people.
24. Occasionally, of course, ministers and others fail to live out their calling in the way that the Church reasonably expects them to do. Those who engage with them in the processes of Reflective Supervision approved by the Church, those who otherwise have oversight of them, and those who are recipients of their ministry or other forms of discipleship, should find in the Expectations suggestions about how levels of appropriate conduct and competence can be identified and assessed. They are not, however, designed to be a list against which complaints should be made. What they might offer is guidance for those involved in any complaint about the reasonable expectations of the Church in the matters concerned.
25. The overarching purpose, however, of the Commitments and Expectations is not to incite guilt in the practitioner (lay or ordained) but to assist in the reasoned review of self and practice which is part of living and working accountably in a covenant relationship.

APPENDIX 2 MINISTRY SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY: OVERVIEW

1. In 2021 the Conference adopted a statement 'Ministry in the Methodist Church'. Two excerpts from the Executive Summary that prefaces it are:

The Methodist Church continues to affirm that the ministry of the whole people of God is central to its understanding of ministry. Whilst 'ministry' or 'ministries' can also refer to the particular institutional forms which this service takes, the Church's ministry is a participation in the ministry of Christ. Ministry is therefore primarily about the witness of the whole people of God in the world. It is never merely an individual endeavour but always exercised as part of the Body of Christ. All members of the Church share in ministry and the ministry of the Church is exercised as Christians together respond to God's call and discover and use the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them.

The Methodist Church's understanding of ordained ministry is rooted in and flows from its affirmation of the ministry of the whole people of God. As its understanding of ministry begins with the calling of the whole people of God, then ordained ministry exists as representative of the total ministry of the Church. In order to help the Church fulfil its calling, some are set apart through ordination to ensure that the Church fulfils this purpose. Ministers are a sign of the presence and ministry of Christ. The Methodist Church has two orders of ministry: presbyters and deacons. Presbyters are ordained to a ministry of Word and Sacrament, and deacons are ordained to a ministry of Witness and Service. All deacons in the Methodist Church also belong to the Methodist Diaconal Order.²³

2. In the following document and in the material and programmes to which it refers, the term 'ministers' will therefore be used in the narrower sense to refer to all those who are ordained, both presbyters and deacons. (The terms 'presbyters' and 'deacons' will be used respectively when particular comments refer to only one of the two orders of ministry).
3. What distinguishes all these ordained ministers, no matter in what type of appointment they serve, or whether they are in the active work or supernumerary (i.e. retired), is that they are all in a covenant relationship with the Conference.

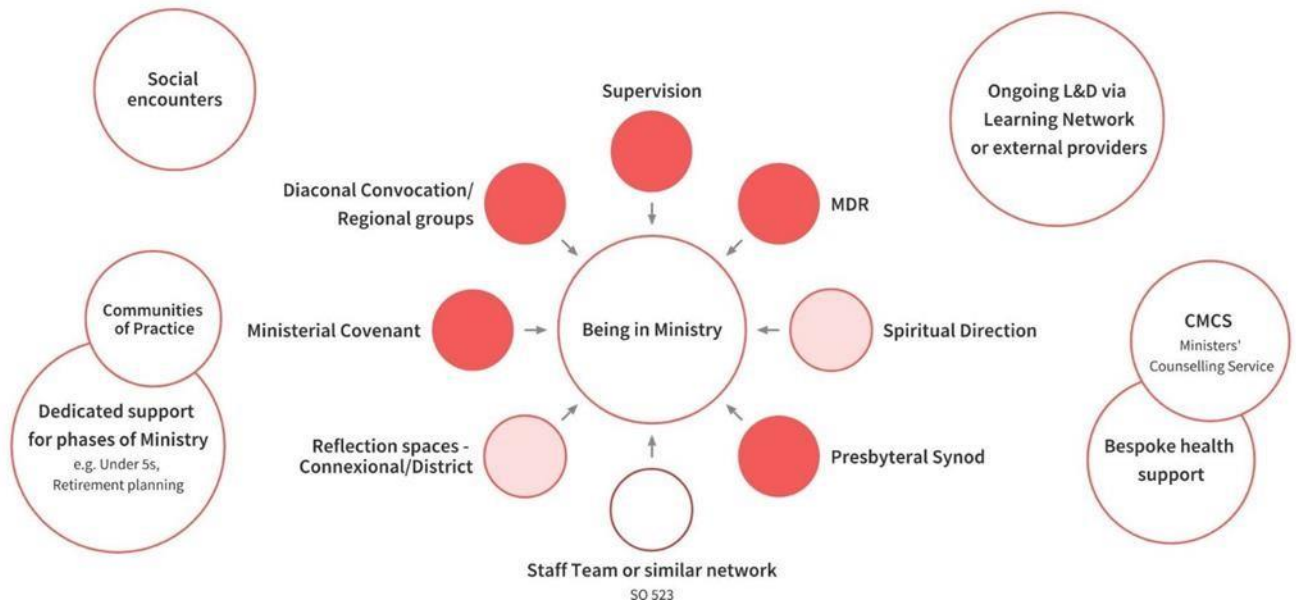
When they are received into Full Connexion, ministers enter a covenant relationship with the Conference. At the heart of this mutual relationship, made possible through God's grace, both the ministers and the Conference have appropriate privileges and responsibilities: "Under the will of God the ministers are accountable to the Conference for the exercise of their ministry and for the execution of the Conference's vision and will. At the same time they are accounted for by the Conference in that the Conference is committed to deploying them all appropriately and to providing them with the resources and support necessary for them to fulfil their ministry."²⁴

4. There is therefore a mutual relationship between ministers, both individually and corporately, on the one hand, and on the other the Conference and those individuals and bodies that represent it. It is a mutual relationship of pastoral care and oversight or, in more general terms, support and accountability. These need to be held together in tension. If they are, the result is very enriching both for ministers and for the wider Church.
5. What has begun to emerge in recent years is the recognition of an overall framework of support and accountability for ministers and those who have responsibilities towards them within the Church. It can be shown in diagrammatic form as follows.

²³ The full text of this report is available here: [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 1 \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conference-2021-agenda-volume-1)

²⁴ From 'Ministry in the Methodist Church' 2021 para 7.4.2.4 which in turn quotes 'Releasing Ministers for Ministry' 2002 para 4.2

Ministry Support and Accountability



6. Within that overall framework a particular suite of programmes or set of tools is being developed. As well as the **Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers: Commitments and Expectations** these include the following.

Handbook for Methodist Ministers

7. This handbook has been produced as part of a suite of handbooks designed to assist Methodists to inhabit various roles to which they have been called. In this case it is intended to bring together basic information and reference material to assist and support each individual as they carry out their ordained ministry.
8. The Handbook is not the definitive guide to being a Methodist minister. God calls a wide range of people into different sorts of ordained vocation and that is to be celebrated. Every person's ministry is unique to them. The Handbook may therefore be of particular use for those who are starting out as probationer deacons and presbyters. For experienced ministers, there may be much in it that seems obvious, but it is hoped that there may also be elements that are helpful when they face certain circumstances. It is intended to be a reference guide to call on when needed.

Reflective Supervision Policy²⁵

9. Reflective supervision is defined as a form of pastoral supervision adopted within an organisational structure. It is understood as an exploratory and reflective process in which one or more ministry practitioners covenant to meet together with a trained, resourced and approved supervisor to reflect on their vocation and practice. The intention of such regular and focused reflection on practice is to provide support for the responsible exercise of the grace of ministry. Studies have shown, and the Methodist Church's own research has endorsed, that to be effective such supervision needs to be frequent, open and supportive.
10. Reflective supervision in the Methodist Church has three main functions:
- to support the wellbeing and development of those who minister (through providing reliable relational accompaniment);

²⁵ The following material is adapted from paragraphs 1.2, 1.61, 1.62 and 1.63 of the 'Supervision Policy 2021-26' adopted by the 2021 Conference, and which is to be found in [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 2 \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conference-2021-agenda-volume-2)

- to safeguard the interests of those amongst whom ministry is exercised, including those of children and vulnerable adults (through underpinning the risk assessment, boundary alertness and role clarity that help support the safeguarding of everyone in church life);
- to ensure that the ministry offered in the name of the Methodist Church is collegially and accountably reflected upon in the light of God's mission and the purposes of the Methodist Church (through providing skilled and intentional space for discerning what God is saying both to individuals and to the Church as a whole in a period of accelerating change).

11. Effective supervision in this context rests on three pillars.

Normative:

- Shared theological reflection on the practices and vocation of ministry within the horizon of God's mission and within the Methodist Church's standing orders and doctrinal standards.
- The shared identification of risks to self and others and the Methodist Church and the identification of steps to ameliorate those risks.

Formative:

- Support for lifelong learning, formation and development in ministry through shared reflection and identification of ongoing development needs.
- The exploration of creative approaches to demanding issues of ministry and relationships as they arise.

Restorative:

- Ensuring that the vocation and work of the minister is shared, valued and nurtured.
- Ensuring that health and wellbeing issues for ministers are monitored and addressed.

12. The research that the Ministries Team has conducted has underlined the mutually reinforcing impact of these three dimensions of reflective supervision.

Ministerial Development Review²⁶

13. Ministerial Development Review (MDR) is rooted in the covenant relationship between the Conference and its ordained ministers. Its aim is to provide an opportunity for structured and contextual reflection on ministry in situ.

14. The MDR process is nested in partnership where a minister is supported by both a lay and an ordained contributor. Together they form a triplet for the specific purpose of review and reflection. The main feature of it is an annual opportunity for the minister to meet within their triplet to consider the subtleties of ministry and discern God's voice. That involves looking with others who know the landscape at how ministry is exercised in a particular appointment effectively and appropriately within the parameters laid down by the Church. MDR focuses on specific aspects of ministry in context. It considers areas of ministry and helps by taking a closer look at one particular element of the work. Ministers can often be embedded in a particular context for a number of years, and MDR offers the opportunity to look at different aspects of work, over a period of time, with a different focus on each occasion. Therefore, alongside themes arising in supervision conversations (or indeed noticeably not discussed there), this conversation will also include considering one aspect or another of the Ministerial Covenant, which is itself built on the Competencies for Ministry approved by the Conference. The aim is to create an atmosphere of continuous improvement and discernment in any given sphere of ministry.

15. For MDR to be a fruitful experience it needs to be:

- enfolded in an ethos of prayer and trust
- planted on a firm foundation of local and contextual feedback

²⁶ The following material is adapted from 'Ministerial Development Review – a Guide' to be published in 2022.

- interwoven with the Supervision process and themes arising
- mindful of the Ministerial Covenant
- a place where ministry in all its complexity can be both celebrated and renewed.

APPENDIX 3 INDEX OF EXISTING GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

1 What are ministers expected to do/be?

- The ordinal (*The Methodist Worship Book*, pp. 297-328)
- Clause 4 of the Deed of Union – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14766/conf-2019cpd-vol-2.pdf> (pp. 213-214)
- Criteria for the selection of candidates for ordained ministry (2003) – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11855/g-4-selection-criteria-for-ordained-ministry-inthethodist-church.pdf>
- Expected competencies at various points in ministry - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/competencies/>; including at the point of initial stationing https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8435/competencies-4_those_entering_first_appointment.pdf, and at the point of reception into full connexion and ordination https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8436/competencies5_those_ready_to_be_rifc_ordination.pdf See also the *Handbook for Ministerial Probation* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/12355/final-handbook-for-ministerial-probation-20192020final.pdf>
- *The Superintendents' Handbook* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11077/superintendents-handbook-0319.pdf>
- The Methodist Diaconal Order Rule of Life – Standing Order 750 (3); CPD Book IV B Part 5; and <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/themethodist-church/the-diaconal-order/living-by-a-rule/>
- *Ordination* (1974) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol1_0409.pdf (beginning on p. 108)
- *The Ministry of the People of God* (1988) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_Part1_0409.pdf (beginning on p. 229)
- *The Methodist Diaconal Order* (1993) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_Part1_0409.pdf (beginning on p. 291)
- *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf
- *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* (2002) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-releasing-ministers-for-ministry-2002.pdf
- *What is a Presbyter?* (2002) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter2002.pdf
- *What is a Deacon?* (2004) <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-deacon-2004.pdf>
- *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) – www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conferencereports/2005-reports
- *The Covenant Relationship for those who are Ordained and in Full Connexion* (2008) – www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2008-reports
- *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2021) – www.methodist.org.uk/conference/2021-agenda-volume-1

2 How are they expected to do / be this?

- With regard to ways of working: *Flexible Patterns of Ministry* (1999) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-flexible-patterns-of-ministry-1999.pdf
- With regard to confidentiality: *With Integrity and Skill* (2008) – www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf08_18_With_Integrity_and_Skill.pdf
- With regard to Reflective Supervision: Reflective Supervision Report (2021) – [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 2 \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://www.methodist.org.uk/conference-2021-agenda-volume-2)
- With regard to development: Ministerial Development Review – www.methodist.org.uk/ministersand-office-holders/leadership-and-ministry/ministerialdevelopment-review
- With regard to conflict and positive working together – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/>
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4291/positive-working-together-long-report-0615.pdf>
- With regard to online presence and behaviour: Social media guidelines – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/technology-andchurch/socialmedia-guidelines/>
- With regard to Safeguarding: Policy <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/15910/bookmarkedsafeguarding-policies-procedures-andguidance-for-the-methodist-church-october-2019.pdf>
plus the learning and recommendations from the Past Cases Review (2015) <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4409/past-cases-review-2013-2015-final.pdf>
For the full resources see also <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/>
- With regard to the wellbeing and care of ministers (including issues of ill-health, stress, disabilities etc), see <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-forchurches/wellbeing/ministerswith-ill-health/>
- With regard to living with contradictory convictions, see Faith and Order Committee B (2006) – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-reports/conference-reports-2006/>

3. Guidelines and standards regulating the life of the Church as a whole

- Legislation (e.g. the Equality Act 2010 – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/forchurches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-andinclusion/legislation/>)
See also, Equality, diversity and inclusion guidance – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversityandinclusion/>
- *Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21966/conf-2021-56-strategy-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity-working-towards-a-fully-inclusive-methodist-church.pdf>
- Standing Orders (see 700 and 701 for ordained presbyteral and diaconal ministry) – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14766/conf-2019-cpd-vol-2.pdf> (pp. 548-550)
- Handbooks:
Circuit Stewards' Handbook – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/12529/circuit-stewards-handbook-2019.pdf>
Church Stewards' Handbook – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/15203/3321-church-stewards-handbook-2019-4.pdf>
- *Our Calling* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/our-calling/>
- *Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions (2021)* – <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21969/conf-2021-59-marriage-and-relationships-provisional-resolutions-updated.pdf>