

25. Stationing Committee

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Stationing Committee wishes to express its grateful thanks to all those who have given many hours of work to this important task in challenging circumstances as we begin to assess the changing needs of our congregations and ministers following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2. The Stationing Committee has been pleased to welcome the Revd Jenny Impey as the new Chair of the Stationing Matching Group. She has guided the stationing matching process with wisdom, great care and good humour as the Stationing Matching Group has worked both in person and remotely this year.
- 1.3. The circuit appointments submitted for Stationing Matching were, once again, scrutinised carefully in order to understand the needs of the Connexion. Those places agreed to be of very great need are prioritised in the Stationing Matching Meetings and every effort is made to provide such places with a minister, although this is becoming increasingly difficult as needs increase.
- 1.4. The imbalance between the number of available circuit appointments and the number of presbyters available for stationing to circuit appointments is becoming greater. The Stationing Committee understands that much reconfiguration of Circuits and development of teams of lay workers, deacons and presbyters is being undertaken to facilitate effective mission and ministry and is very grateful for these initiatives.
- 1.5. A significant number of appointments in the matching process need particular gifts, graces and skills. The Stationing Committee is grateful to the presbyters and deacons who offer to develop their skills and use them to further mission and ministry.
- 1.6. The Stationing Committee has continued to work carefully to continue to challenge any discriminatory behaviour of which it is aware. The Committee is grateful for the time and expertise generously given by Bevan Powell, the Connexional Adviser for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion this year in helping us examine and improve both our procedures and documents. We remain committed to continuing this work, believing that discrimination in any form is contrary to the Gospel.
- 1.7. A trial of an online process was undertaken for stationing matching 2021/2022 and it is now clear that more work is necessary on the development of the system before it can be introduced more widely.

2. Stationing Matching Group

- 2.1. Stationing matching is a process in which we attempt to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Circuits and presbyters. This year the Stationing Matching Group (SMG) was able to meet in person for the first two rounds which enhanced that sense of the whole Connexion being present in one place, with each minister and Circuit known. The work was, as always, conducted carefully and prayerfully with

time being taken to consider each presbyter and circuit as the group sought to make matches which would enable presbyters and Circuits to flourish in mission and ministry and ensure ministry was spread across the Connexion in response to the greatest need.

- 2.2.** By the beginning of the matching process, 133 circuit profiles and 81 presbyteral profiles had been submitted. As the process continued, a further eight circuit profiles and five presbyteral profiles were submitted. With forty-four of the appointments being designated Critical after scrutiny, the challenges were significant and many presbyters and Circuits were asked to explore matches beyond their indicative lists in order to help the Conference to station ministers across the Connexion to the areas of greatest need. Inevitably, it was not possible to make matches for every appointment and throughout the process discernment continued with permission being given for profiles to be reshaped in order that matches might be made with deacons, probationer presbyters and those who have been recommended for transfer from other churches and conferences.
- 2.3.** During the first meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG 1), at the beginning of November, there were 133 Circuits seeking presbyters and 75 presbyters available for matching. Seventy-four matches were made, including matches for forty-two out of the then forty-three critical appointments. Thirty-one out of forty-two visits to critical appointments resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Twenty-six out of thirty-two visits to the other appointments resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Overall, 77% of the visits resulted in accepted invitations.
- 2.4.** At the beginning of December, the SMG met at Cliff College. Twenty-two matches were made, including seven to critical appointments. Three out of seven visits to critical appointments resulted in invitations being issued. Ten out of fifteen visits to the other appointments resulted in invitations being issued and accepted. Overall, 59% of the visits resulted in accepted invitations.
- 2.5.** The third meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG 3) was held online in January. At that stage there were fifty-three Circuits, among them nine appointments designated as critical, seeking presbyters and only thirteen presbyters available. Matches were found for all thirteen, but these only included one critical appointment. Eleven out of thirteen visits resulted in invitations being issued and accepted.
- 2.6.** Since SMG 3, the Stationing Action Group has met monthly to seek to match the remaining presbyters together with others who become available during the connexional year. At the time of writing, eight Circuits (including one critical) are seeking presbyters and there are three presbyters available.
- 2.7.** The Stationing Matching Group is grateful for the engagement of presbyters and circuits in exploring the matches, all those who prepared profiles, drew up lists to indicate the kinds of presbyters and Circuits they could see themselves working with and flourishing in, prepared for visits and travelled out of their comfort zones to engage prayerfully in discernment conversations. The final recommendations to the Conference come not from the SMG but from the presbyters and Circuits who say yes to one another and begin the journey of discovering gifts and opportunities for

mission and who will commit themselves at welcome services to “join together in the work to which God has called us.” (*Methodist Worship Book* page 361)

- 2.8. The SMG invited Bevan Powell to observe SMG 2 and was grateful for his reflections and looks forward to working with him on how we can continue to build on our commitment to justice, dignity and solidarity.

3. Report of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee (ISSC)

- 3.1. The ISSC 1 met on 5-6 January 2022.

3.2. Probationer Appointments

Twenty-three presbyteral probationer profiles had been approved by the Initial Stationing Scrutiny group. The scrutiny group was able to work with all Circuits who submitted profiles, which meant that all were accepted. However, several came into the process later than the timetable for initial submission. Three of these twenty-three profiles were submitted for a probationer presbyter or a Minister of another Conference or Church (MOCC).

3.3. Probationers

Twenty-two presbyteral probationers were matched with appointments.

ISSC 1 noted that seven diaconal probationers were being considered by the Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee between 7-9 January 2022. All seven were subsequently matched with appointments. One of these is restarting probation in a new appointment.

The ISSC 2 met on 8 February 2022.

3.4. Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs)

Ten Ministers of other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs) were matched with appointments. Five of these are recommended to become ‘Recognised and Regarded’ ministers. One is recommended to be an ordained probationer deacon with a view to being received into Full Connexion after the conclusion of two years of probation. One is recommended to be a probationer presbyter. Three are recommended to be received into Full Connexion.

Two other MOCCs were appointed to appointments outside the control of the church after the necessary processes (prison chaplaincy and Forces chaplaincy): one was recommended to become ‘Recognised and Regarded’ and the other was recommended to be received into Full Connexion.

One further minister has been recommended to become ‘Recognised and Regarded’ and appointed to Cliff College. This is an appointment in the control of the church but is not a circuit appointment.

One further match was made by the Stationing Action Group of a MOCC to be received into Full Connexion to an appointment which came into stationing after ISSC 2.

One of the circuit appointments was submitted for a MOCC at the outset of stationing. A further one was submitted for a probationer or a MOCC at the outset of stationing. All of the others were submitted later within the stationing process or were reshaped from appointments in the stationing matching process (most after SMG 3).

Four MOCCs (two recommended to become R&R and two recommended for Full Connexion) have not been matched and their profiles remain under consideration by the Stationing Action Group until the Conference 2022 and will then be held over for ISSC 2 in 2023.

The Stationing Committee confirmed that MOCC appointments should be capped at 10-12 each year (but it should be noted that those chosen to be in appointments that are outside the control of the church or not in circuits, are not counted within the cap).

Summary of MOCC matches this year:

- Five Recognised and Regarded (R&R) presbyters.
- One ordained probationer deacon.
- One probationer presbyter.
- Four presbyters to be received into full connexion

TOTAL 11

3.5. Outstanding Appointments

As there is a cap of twelve appointments and eleven have been filled, only one further match can be made in the 2021-2022 connexional year, unless (as noted above) appointments are made outside of the control of the Church.

4. Report of the Stationing Action Group

4.1 The Stationing Action Group (SAG) (convened by the Revd Graham Thompson) commenced its work on 7 February 2022 and will continue through to the Conference. At the beginning of the process, there were thirty-seven available appointments (of which eight had been identified as 'critical'). Ten presbyters (not all of whom have been available to be matched for a variety of reasons) had still to agree an appointment.

4.2 Since then, twelve presbyters (including five Ministers from Other Conferences and Churches) and one appointment have been added into the mix. Two presbyters have withdrawn to take up other appointments.

4.3 In February, four matches were made which led to invitations to serve being accepted by three presbyters. In March, six matches were made which led to invitations to serve being accepted by five presbyters. One successful match was made at the end of March.

4.4 Following submission of a reasoned statement, eighteen requests were made to withdraw Circuit profiles, as at the end of March. Two of these were for 'critical' appointments.

4.5 The actions reported mean that at Easter 2022 there remain eleven available appointments, including two 'critical' appointments and three superintendencies. There are also eight presbyters, including four MOCCs, who have not yet been successfully matched with an appointment.

4.6 The Stationing Action Group is pleased to support the work of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee and, so far, has assisted with two appointments.

5. Report on Diaconal Stationing

5.1 Diaconal stationing matching began with fifteen ordained deacons and seven diaconal probationers and initially eight circuit profiles, of which three were suitable for diaconal probationers; leaving a shortfall of fourteen circuit appointments.

5.2 Prior to SMG 1, the stationing scrutiny panel asked some Circuits to consider and explore converting their presbyteral profile into a diaconal profile.

5.3 Between the September profile deadline and the January Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee (DSSC) matching meeting another seventeen profiles were submitted; seven of which were reshaped profiles.

5.4 All appointments were carefully scrutinised. Visits continue to be an essential part of the diaconal direct stationing process and despite ongoing concerns around COVID-19 and in several cases a limited time frame, all appointments were able to have some form of a 'visit' with the Warden/Deputy Warden.

5.5 In January, the DSSC matched fifteen ordained deacons and seven diaconal probationers to twenty-two of the twenty-five circuit profiles. The matches were called at SMG 3. At the end of January all but one of these matches were confirmed.

5.6 During February, March and April the DSSC continued to work in collaboration with the Stationing Action Group, with the three unmatched Circuits and with members of the Order. In the April meeting of SAG, two further matches were made and confirmed. At the time of writing, this currently leaves one Circuit unmatched.

5.7 The DSSC is aware and grateful how its work has been enabled by the willingness of Circuits to discern diaconal appointments and, in one case, to enable a deacon to be matched with a new appointment earlier than expected. In addition, the DSSC continues to give thanks for the grace and commitment of deacons to live out the diaconal principles of itinerancy and direct stationing and their willingness to embrace the way of the God of Surprises and the Unexpected.

6. Stationing Code of Practice

As in every year, amendments have been made to the Stationing Code of Practice which reflect changes in standing orders, the removal of gender based personal pronouns and other matters which the Stationing Committee wish to emphasise in the light of experience from year to year.

7. Projections

Number of Methodist presbyters and probationers in the active work

Connexional Year	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Estimate
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Start of year	1387	1340	1308	1210	1158
Normal retirements	60	49	80	60	60
Early retirements	14	4	4	8	4
Resignations	2	6	13	7	6
Other losses	1	0	1	2	1
TOTAL LOSSES	77	59	98	77	71
New probationers	23	17	13	20	20
Other gains	7	10	5	5	5
TOTAL GAINS	30	27	18	25	20
END OF YEAR	1340	1308	1210	1158	1112

Number of Methodist deacons and probationers in the active work

Connexional Year	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Estimate
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Start of year	135	134	135	134	133
Retirements	3	3	5	5	5
Resignations	1	0	1	0	0
Other losses	0	0	0	1	0
TOTAL LOSSES	4	3	6	6	5
New probationers	3	4	5	5	5
Other gains	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL GAINS	3	4	5	5	5
END OF YEAR	134	135	134	133	133

8. Moving Forward

8.1 The Stationing Committee will play a significant role in a thorough review of all our stationing processes this year in order to ensure that we develop robust and coherent policies designed to ensure well supported mission and ministry across the Connexion. It is vitally important to ensure the continuing well-being of our deacons and presbyters in addition to providing ministers to those places where they are most needed.

8.2 The context in which the Stationing Committee does its work remains challenging but the developments that the Committee has overseen this year and planned for the future cause it to remain hopeful that we are finding appropriate ways to station our ministers in the service of *Our Calling*.

*****RESOLUTION**

25/1. The Conference received the Report.