

Conference Business Digest: A report for local churches about the business of the 2024 Methodist Conference



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The 2024 Methodist Conference, held at New Dock Hall, Leeds:
Presbyteral Session 27-28 June; Representative Session 29 June – 3 July.

methodist.org.uk/conference

The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church in Great Britain and meets annually to discuss matters affecting the life of the Church, the nations and the world.

Induction of the President and Vice-President for 2024/2025

On Saturday 29 June, the Revd Helen Cameron was elected and inducted as President of the Conference, and Mrs Carolyn Godfrey as Vice-President. They shared their theme of 'Seeking Justice' in their addresses to the Conference.

You can read both addresses in full here:

methodist.org.uk/PresidentsAddress2024

methodist.org.uk/VicePresidentsAddress2024

Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination Services

New presbyters and deacons were ordained on Sunday 30 June 2024. During the Sunday worship, 23 presbyters and seven deacons were received into Full Connexion with the Conference, along with ten presbyters by transfer, and one presbyter by reinstatement and transfer when they were presented to the members of the Methodist Conference and to its President and Vice-President.

Having been received into Full Connexion on Sunday morning, those presbyters and deacons not already ordained travelled to churches around the region with their families and friends for the ordination services.

Oversight and Trusteeship

The Conference adopted the Standing Order changes which enable the Connexional Council to come into being from 1 September 2024. The Connexional Council will be the trustee body for the Church's connexional business and property, and will undertake many of the functions of the present Methodist Council and Strategy and Resources Committee. The Conference received the report of the Nominations Committee and appointed the members of the new Connexional Council as recommended to it by that Committee.

The Conference agreed to the establishment of a new District incorporating the present Plymouth and Exeter and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Districts. The new District will come into being on 1 September 2024 and will be called the South West Peninsula District. The Conference agreed that the present Manchester and Stockport District should be incorporated into the new North West England District, when it is established on 1 September 2024. The Conference also agreed to the establishment on 1 September 2025 of a new District, the West Midlands District, comprising the present Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District and Birmingham District. In dealing with nominations and stationing, the Conference appointed the Revd Dr James Tebbutt as Chair of North West England, the Revd Dr Dan Haylett as Chair of the South West Peninsula, and the Revd Novette Headley as Chair of the West Midlands.

Budget

The Conference adopted the connexional central services budget for 2024/2025, noting that transitional funding is required whilst the Connexional Team is transformed to match the requirements of the Church within the resources available. Following a review, it adopted a revised Reserves Policy.

Pension Schemes

This report updated the Conference on pension matters, particularly noting the improved funding position. In the light of that, the Conference agreed that the voluntary contributions to the Pension Reserve Fund should now be returned to the donors with interest paid at the CFB Deposit Rate. It approved that surplus funding in the Pension Reserve Fund should be transferred to the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons and the Connexional Priority Fund. The Conference also approved a payment from the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme surplus of a discretionary inflation uplift of 5% over and above the planned inflation in September 2024.

A justice-seeking Church: conferring on justice priorities

Following the Conference's adoption last year of the Justice-Seeking Church report, it spent time conferring on the justice priority of poverty in the UK. The Conference was led each day in a Bible study which also focused on this theme; these were led by Jenny Sinclair, Founder Director of Together for the Common Good.

Online church and online communion

The 2023 Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, to consider what work would be needed in order to enable predominantly online churches to be recognised in the Church's polity. This consideration has taken place alongside the period of discernment in respect of online celebrations of Holy Communion which was due to end in 2024. The Conference heard that the responses received during the period of discernment were insufficient to enable

a recommendation to be made regarding a lasting decision concerning celebrations of Holy Communion online. The Conference therefore extended the period of discernment until 31 August 2026. The report acknowledged the increasing importance of online mission and ministry and the desire to incorporate predominantly online churches into the polity and purposes of the Methodist Church and provide them with an appropriate and safe framework. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to establish a task group to consider the recommendations of this report and to bring appropriate proposals to the Conference of 2026.

Review of Part 11 of Standing Orders

The Conference received the report and adopted the recommendations of the review of the Church's complaints and discipline processes as set out in Part 11 of Standing Orders. The recommendations seek to ensure that the tenets and principles of the current processes are retained, whilst enhancing the core values of seeking resolution whilst providing support to those impacted by the processes. The emphasis is on seeking reconciliation and resolution at an early stage where that is appropriate. To assist with clarity, there will be a tiered approach to complaints (reconciliation and resolution, investigation, and hearing), with increased options available at the investigation stage. It is anticipated that the Standing Order changes to effect this will be brought to the 2025 Conference.

Singleness

Following a notice of motion brought in 2022, the Conference received a report from the Faith and Order Committee which sought to offer some reflections on singleness. The report recommended exploring the synergy between welcoming, affirming and celebrating the presence and contribution of single people in the church's life and the theological foundations and emphases of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS), adopted by the Conference in 2021. The report includes some practical guidance for

local churches, and the Conference commended it for study and comment, inviting feedback to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee (faithandorder@methodistchurch.org.uk) by 1 September 2025.

God for All

The Conference celebrated the work achieved so far as part of the Church's God For All Strategy for Evangelism and Growth and reaffirmed it for its next phase for the period from 2025 to 2032. The strategy links encouragement for bold evangelism with the Church's missional priorities of justice, ministry in economically-marginalised communities, and worship renewal. The Conference commended the report to the Methodist Church for continuing prayerful discernment and missional action throughout the Connexion.

3Generate

The report to the Conference detailed how the children and young people had expressed their views as part of their participation at 3Generate, the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly, held last October at the NEC in Birmingham. It explained how children and young people are aware of the ever-increasing social injustices that are present within our society in Britain and internationally and how the Church can support them as they grow in faith.

Memorials

Memorials are requests from Circuit Meetings and District Synods to the Conference. They play a vital part in enabling the Conference to hear and to respond to concerns from across the Connexion. This year, the Conference considered and replied to 22 memorials on topics including the theology of artificial intelligence, disciplinary process,

telling our story, heritage sites, resourcing, the situation in Israel/Palestine, Conference venues, the mission partner programme, connexional financial support, housing allowance for authorised ministers, ministerial suspension, ministerial stress, mandatory training requirements, modified constitutions. In considering memorials expressing concern for the Nassar family at their farm, Tent of Nations, near Bethlehem in the Occupied West Bank, the Conference received a video message from Daoud Nassar, and affirmed its prayerful solidarity with the family.

President and Vice-President designated for 2025/2026

The Conference designated the Revd Richard Andrew to be President and Mr Matthew Forsyth to be Vice-President of the Conference 2025/2026.

Appointments

The Conference made a number of appointments and reappointments, including: the Revd Sonia Hicks as Chair of the Connexional Council; Keith Hickey as Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee; Daleep Mukarji as Chair of the Conference Business Committee for the Conferences of 2025, 2026 and 2027; the Revd Helen Hollands as Chair for the East Anglia District from 1 September 2024; the Revd Rachel Bending as Chair for the Southampton District from 1 September 2024; the Revd Dr Jonathan Dean as Chair for the London District from 1 September 2024; the Revd Jonathan Sewell as Chair for the Newcastle upon Tyne District from 1 September 2024; the Revd Victoria Atkins as Chair for the Sheffield District from 1 September 2025.

Future dates of the Conference

The Methodist Conference will meet in Telford from 26 June - 2 July 2025.

The **Methodist Church** 

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