

What is a Circuit Superintendent?

1. This report builds on the major report to the 2005 Conference *The Nature of Oversight*. It is one of several related pieces of work that develop the insights of that report with regard to particular bodies and ministerial roles in the Methodist Church. The others to be presented to the 2005 Conference are
 - *What Sort of Bishops?*
 - *The Review of the Methodist Conference*
 - *The Review of the Methodist Council*It is also hoped to bring to the 2006 Conference
 - *What is a District Chair?*
2. Beyond that, this report's starting points are:
 - the report *What is a Presbyterian?* adopted by the Conference in 2002 together with the related report *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*¹ (n.b. also the companion report *What is a Deacon?* adopted by the Conference in 2004)
 - the material concerning Superintendents in the *Deed of Union and Standing Orders*²
 - the report *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* adopted by the Conference in 1999³
3. As with *What is a Presbyterian?* and *What is a Deacon?* this report seeks to discern the intention which is variously embodied in Methodist history and current practice, and so describe an ideal which can function as a model of best practice to be reflected upon and re-embodied in a variety of situations in the future.⁴ It seeks to help shape future practice by describing what is currently good practice. As such, its intention is to encourage, stimulate and assist both Superintendents and the circuits.

¹ Methodist Conference 2002 Agenda pp. 446-454 and 455-467 respectively. The reports are also reprinted in *Over to You 2002* Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough 2002 pp. 74-82 and 83-96.

² The Deed of Union goes back to the signing of the Deed at the union of various Methodist churches in 1932, although some parts of the content go beyond it to earlier official statements in some of the uniting traditions. It can be amended by the Conference after due scrutiny and legislative process. The current form of the Deed and of the Standing Orders governing the life of the church are to be found in Volume 2 of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* published annually through the Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough.

³ *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough 1999, reprinted in *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* Vol. 2 Part 1 Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough 2000 pp. 1-59.

⁴ It can therefore be used to help improve the setting up of appointments for Superintendents in circuits, and the "recruitment" or "selection" of potential Superintendents. It can also be used to set outcomes for the training of Superintendents.

Superintendents and presbyters

4. First and foremost, Superintendents are presbyters who in exercising their ministry undertake particular responsibilities on behalf of the Conference in particular situations to which they are appointed. There is a central and common core to this role but they express it in a variety of ways, depending on their situation, personality type and on how the fruits and gifts of the Spirit are manifested in and released through them. In this way they are potentially a means of grace in that they are part of God's gift to the Church and the world.
5. The term 'Superintendent' evolved in Britain before the death of Wesley as a description of the responsibilities of some of his Assistants (a role which later evolved into what is now known as ordained presbyteral ministry). Wesley saw Methodism as both a holiness movement and a mission movement within the Church of England. In the former sense it called people within the Church to grow in love for God and the world, and provided the means and structures for them to assist each other in so doing. In the latter sense it called them to grow in evangelism and service to the world, and again provided them with the means and structures to do so. If new people were contacted and awakened to faith as a result of what the Methodists did as a missionary movement, they were to be linked with the life of the Church (in particular for worship and the sacraments) and then, as appropriate, called into the holiness movement.
6. For this reason, the leaders of the Methodist movement were not meant to be like the residential or parochial clergy of the Church of England. A number of what we would now recognise as lay offices were therefore being developed: the first Conference of 1744 mentions Stewards (who dealt with financial matters), Leaders (who dealt with pastoral and spiritual matters in the Classes etc.), Schoolmasters and Housekeepers. There were then the Preachers or Helpers and Assistants, who were what Wesley termed 'extraordinary messengers' calling people to discern and respond to the dynamics of the Kingdom of God as it continually broke out in new ways.⁵ Gradually these Preachers were sub-divided into local preachers and itinerant preachers and, more or less co-terminously, into ordinary Preachers or Helpers on the one hand and Assistants on the other. The advice to Preachers and Assistants in the Minutes of the 1786 Conference taken together with the statements about the office of an Assistant from the 1744 Conference made it clear that local Leaders could not of themselves admit people into or expel them from the Methodist Societies. The Preachers in turn had to support the authority of the Assistants. It was the Assistants who had to order and provide for worship for the societies they visited; organise the groups that would prompt and enable people to grow in discipleship; and make the decisions about whom to admit or expel and which group to place them in; and oversee the practical organisation of the societies, changing Stewards where necessary and checking that they were keeping proper accounts.

⁵ See further *What is a Presbyter?* para 1 note 4 and the extended note after para 4.9 of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*.

7. In the Minutes of the 1744 Conference the office of an Assistant is stated as “In the absence of the Minister to feed and guide, to teach and govern the flock”. The Minister in this instance would be Wesley himself or one of his ordained Anglican colleagues. After the death of Wesley these Assistants gradually evolved into what we call ordained presbyters, but presbyters who carried out some particular “episcopal” functions. Thus we find as early as in the Minutes of the 1749 Conference “Q. Who is the Assistant? A. *That Preacher in each Circuit, who is appointed from time to time, to take charge of the Societies, and the preachers therein.* Q. How should an Assistant be qualified for this charge? A. *By walking closely with God, and having (God’s) work greatly at heart; by understanding and loving discipline, ours in particular; and by loving the Church of England, and resolving not to separate from it.* Q. What is the business of an Assistant? A. *To see that the other Preachers in the Circuit behave well and want nothing.....*” Even before the death of Wesley we therefore find that some of the Assistants were growing into what would eventually be known as “Superintendents”.⁶ In particular when more than one Assistant was sent to a circuit, one of them would be designated as the lead person.

8. Eventually, after Wesley’s death in 1791, the term “Assistant” (which referred to assisting Mr. Wesley) became less appropriate. The Assistant or, if more than one, lead Assistant sent to each circuit therefore quickly began to be known as “Superintendent”, and the term “Superintendent of the Circuit” became a formal title in the Minutes of the 1796 Conference. The dynamics of other processes then led to the development of the role in particular ways. As separation gradually took place from the Church of England⁷, the societies took on some aspects of churches, the ‘extraordinary messengers’ had to take on some of the characteristics of parochial clergy and the Superintendents began to develop from being leaders of a movement within the Church into being leaders among the ordained ministry of a Church. This paralleled developments which had already occurred amongst Methodists in America. The term ‘Superintendent’ first entered Methodism formally not in England but in America. In 1784 Wesley produced an edited version of the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer (1662) for the use of the growing Methodist movement in North America. It was known as *The Sunday Service of the Methodists* and included three services under the heading “The Form and Manner of Making and Ordaining of Superintendants (*sic*), Elders and Deacons” which closely resembled those for bishop, priest

⁶ Wesley ordained Mather in 1788 to serve in Britain and, according to Mather himself in 1791, to be Superintendent.

⁷ There is evidence that in some places frequent communicants in the Parish Church in the mid-19th century were also members of the local Methodist society, and that the Church Wardens were also Methodist Class Leaders. Yet by this time various Methodist traditions existed as recognisably independent and separate entities. Separation therefore occurred at different times in different places and to varying extents. It is arguable that British Methodism would have developed very differently if there had ever been a single moment when the Church of England had declared that all Methodists should be excluded, or when all Methodists had declared that they were becoming independent. British Methodists would have had to think hard about what it meant for it to become a Church (and might therefore have ended up looking like the Methodist Church in the U.S.A. which was deliberately structured as a Church by Wesley himself in 1784). Instead Methodism gradually and circumstantially developed from a movement into various denominations or churches (which may or may not have been a good thing).

and deacon in the original. At the same time Wesley reacted to the failure of the Church of England to make provision for the people of North America in the aftermath of the War of Independence by joining with other Anglican priests to ordain Thomas Coke, an Anglican priest, as Superintendent and setting him apart for the work in North America. He also indicated his intention to nominate Francis Asbury, then a lay person, as Joint Superintendent with Coke in North America, but this was not imposed on people. Only after Coke had arrived in America and ascertained that the people there approved of and shared in the decision to establish himself and Asbury as Joint Superintendent did Coke ordain Asbury on successive days as Deacon, Elder and Superintendent.

9. In this Wesley was thinking of himself as a “scriptural *episkopos*” [i.e. bishop/superintendent/overseer] who was the extraordinary overseer of a team of extraordinary messengers and of a movement or society of extraordinary disciples.⁸ He felt able to ordain because he followed the arguments put forward by such as King and Stillingfleet that presbyters and bishops sprang from the same order of ministry, the latter being in a higher grade or degree of it than the former.⁹ Yet, in what he did for America he was also, for practical reasons, thinking of the Church and its ordained ministry more than of the leadership of a movement within the Church. When he thought of the ministry of the Church he still thought in terms of deacons, elders/presbyters, and superintendents/bishops. In other words he thought of a three-fold ministry, but more as three distinct degrees or expressions of one basic order of ministry than as three completely separate orders of ministry. Coke and Asbury were therefore charged with ordering the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the godly organisation of the Methodists in North America as the individual societies became local churches and the overall movement a Church. In this we can clearly see the three characteristics of presbyteral ministry (ministry of the word, ministry of sacrament, ministry of pastoral responsibility) being exercised in an episcopal way. As the work developed in North America with its vast distances, more Superintendents were required. Gradually two types of Superintendent emerged: General Superintendents who related to a wide area, and District Superintendents who each related to a district in one of those areas. Interestingly, the District Superintendent was originally known as the presiding Elder (= presbyter) in the District, whereas the General

⁸ See *The Nature of Oversight* 2.18 and 2.19, and *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Volume 1* 1965 p. 242. Wesley describes himself as a scriptural *episkopos* in *Letters Volume VII* ed. Telford 1931 p. 284.

⁹ Wesley wrote in a letter to “Our Brethren in America” in 1784 that “Lord King’s *Account of the Primitive Church* convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain.” [Telford *John Wesley, Letters* 7:238]. He was referring here to Lord Peter King’s work of 1691 *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church*, which he had read in 1746 and which contains the statement “Whatever a bishop did, the same did the presbyter; the particular acts of their office were the same; the only difference that was between them was in degree; but this proves there was none at all in order I hope no one will be offended when I have asserted the equality or identity of the bishops and presbyters as to order, and their difference only as to pre-eminency or degree. . . .”.

Superintendents later came to be known as Bishops. However, the ‘episcopal’ nature of the ministry of the Bishops was in essence the same as that of the District Superintendents and the same as that of all the Elders (i.e. Presbyters). What made a difference was the area of jurisdiction and the particular role being performed.

10. Similarly in Britain a process of evolution occurred as the Methodist movement began to develop into a Church or, rather, as various fissures, secessions and expulsions took place, the Methodist movements developed into Churches. The ordination service for Superintendents had been present in the successive editions of *The Sunday Service* issued during Wesley’s lifetime. Some of these editions were labelled as being for the growing Methodist movement in North America. Others, however, (such as that of 1786) were not so labelled and were available in Britain. However, even after Wesley’s death and after Superintendency became a formal role in 1796, the ordination service for Superintendents was not used. Yet it was printed in the editions of the *Sunday Service* published after Wesley’s death until 1846. At that point the three services for ordaining Superintendents, Elders (presbyters) and Deacons were replaced with a single service for the Ordination of Ministers, which was based on the previous one for Elders (and therefore on that for Priests in the Book of Common Prayer), but which included several elements from that for Superintendents (and therefore from that for Bishops in the Book of Common Prayer). Traditional episcopal functions and expressions of oversight therefore came to be focused in the whole of the ordained ministry, and Superintendents became a particular expression of it. The danger was that the difference between Superintendents and other ministers (and, still more, lay people) became not one of kind but essentially one of power. “..... (It was the allegedly autocratic behaviour of some of the Wesleyan Superintendents which led to some of the divisions of Methodism”.¹⁰ Thus, although the Methodist New Connexion was formed out of a general desire for lay people to participate fully in the governance of the Methodist movement or church, it was O’Bryan’s power struggles with Superintendents which were a major stimulus to the formation of the Bible Christians, who in 1838 replaced the title “Circuit Superintendent” with that of “Circuit Pastor” and only used the term “Superintendent” for the Chairman of a District. Similarly in the “Fly Sheets Controversy” of the 1840’s which eventually led to the formation of the Wesleyan Reform movement, “many circuit superintendents acted with complete arbitrariness in stripping classes of their membership where sympathy with the movement was discovered”, leading to a loss of almost one-third of Wesleyan membership.¹¹
11. Out of all these pragmatic considerations and tensions a process of evolution has occurred since the time of Wesley in the various Methodist traditions and then in the Methodist Church which united around the Deed of Union in 1932. That process led to the influential role of the Superintendent in the 20th century Church, although as the report *The Nature of Oversight* demonstrates it is not an exclusive role in the oversight of the Church but is now

¹⁰ A. Raymond George “Superintendency” in *Epworth Review* vol 1 no. 1, 1974 pp. 79ff.

¹¹ John T. Wilkinson in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Volume 2 p. 321.

complemented by that of formal bodies and representative lay officers. Moreover even with regard to the ordained strand of oversight, the process of evolution has led to another expression of “superintendency” in the form of Chairs of District¹². As with the American developments, two expressions of superintendency have therefore emerged which differ from one another only in the area in which their oversight is exercised and the particular ways in which that context affects the development of their presbyteral ministry.

12. Both Circuit Superintendents and District Chairs are primarily presbyters. As such their whole ministry is essentially a ministry of the word, of sacrament and of pastoral responsibility.¹³ Virtually none of the individual activities which they undertake under these headings is therefore exclusive to them alone. To some extent or other lay people and deacons share and participate in each of them.¹⁴ For example, the story of Coke and Asbury outlined above establishes as a principle that people who represent and embody the oversight

¹² This will be addressed in the report *What is a District Chair?* which is due to be presented to the 2006 Conference.

¹³ These essential characteristics are described more fully in para. 6 of the report *What is a Presbyter?* 2002 as

- a ministry of the **word**: this includes (formal and informal) preaching, evangelism, apologetic, theological and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the articulation of faith and human experience
- a ministry of **sacrament**: this includes presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially baptism (and, in the wider sense of sacramental acts, confirmation) and eucharist
- a ministry of **pastoral responsibility**: this involves collegially ‘watching over’ God’s people in love on behalf of the Conference and includes oversight, direction, discipline, order and pastoral care, and is exercised through a ministry of visitation after watching, praying, waiting on God, and sharing insights with colleagues.

For a restatement and amplification of them and some of their implications for this discussion see paragraph 24ff. below.

¹⁴ Some examples of the ways in which others can participate in the ministries exercised by all presbyters (including those appointed to be Superintendents or District Chairs) are as follows.

- Lay people and deacons can be accredited to preach.
- Lay people and deacons can generally assist presbyters in the administration of the sacraments. Beyond that, where the people of God would otherwise be deprived of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper because there are not enough presbyters available in a particular area, lay people, probationer presbyters and, if required by very exceptional circumstances, deacons can be authorised to preside at the Holy Communion. (In order to emphasise the distinctiveness of deacons and to avoid their being confused with presbyters, the Methodist Diaconal Order does not normally want deacons to be authorised to preside at the Holy Communion.) With regard to baptism, Standing Order 010A(2) states that “Normally baptism shall be administered by a minister, or by a ministerial probationer appointed to the Circuit. However, where local considerations so require, it may be administered, with the approval of the Superintendent, by a deacon or diaconal probationer appointed (in either case) to the Circuit, or by a local preacher. In an emergency baptism may be administered by any person.”
- Lay people and deacons have proper responsibilities and distinct and vital roles in the pastoral oversight of the Church, as office holders and members of the formal groups charged with oversight and decision-making in its various constituent parts.
- Lay people and deacons share in the general responsibility of the whole people of God to have a pastoral care for the spiritual, mental, physical, material and social well-being of other, and can undertake particular acts of pastoral work to embody that care.

of the primary body in the movement¹⁵ have to share that oversight and authority with the proper officers and formal bodies of the place to which they are sent. Nevertheless, even if each of the ministries of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility is shared to some extent or another with lay-people and deacons, presbyters play a distinctive role in each of them, and it is the combination of these roles which is exclusive to and definitive of the presbyter.¹⁶ Moreover the fact that they are combined means that each of the emphases influences the others in a way that creates a distinctive expression of each of them. Thus, for example, the fact that a presbyter exercises pastoral responsibility on behalf of the Conference in a local situation means that she or he has a guiding or presiding role in the exercising of the ministry of the word and ministry of sacrament in that community. Similarly, the fact that he or she exercises a ministry of the word and a ministry of sacrament means that he or she exercises pastoral responsibility through

- (a) constantly referring to, interpreting and rearticulating the word of God
- (b) sacramentally taking what God has already given, offering it back to God in thanksgiving and receiving it from God again as something that is transformed and charged with the ability to transform the world into the Kingdom.

13. The above is as true for Circuit Superintendents as it is for all other presbyters. All presbyters are the same in being, equal in regard but specific in role. All embody the essential characteristics of their ministry in the particular contexts to which they are sent and through distinctive ways of functioning in those contexts. The context for a Chair is the district, to be dealt with in the report *What is a District Chair?* which is due to be presented to the Conference in 2006. The context for a Superintendent is the circuit, which is dealt with below.

Superintendents and circuits

14. The Circuit is one of the two main organisms in British Methodism and the local churches constitute its interdependent cells.¹⁷ It is therefore a primary means of gathering and dispersing people to engage in worship and mission and thereby fulfil their calling, individually as disciples and collectively as a Church.¹⁸
15. As such, the Circuit requires *oversight* in the broadest sense of that term, and in particular (but not exclusively) through theologically informed *governance*, theologically informed *management* and theologically informed *leadership*.¹⁹ Oversight is a means of ensuring that a movement or church remains true to its nature and purpose as it grows and develops and as its context changes. The Conference is the supreme source of oversight under God for the whole Methodist connexion. The Conference delegates and

¹⁵ In that case Coke and Wesley respectively in the first instance, then Coke and a Conference.

¹⁶ See further *The Nature of Oversight* 2.22 – 2.24.

¹⁷ See further the discussion in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.12 of the report *The Nature of Oversight*.

¹⁸ Expressed in the programme *Our Calling* and in the *Priorities for the Methodist Church*.

¹⁹ See further paragraphs 1.1 to 1.15 of the report *The Nature of Oversight*.

shares this oversight (but without ceasing to exercise it itself) with groups of officers and formally constituted bodies in particular situations. At the same time it sends presbyters to those situations in order to embody the other strand of its oversight in them. Oversight only comes to its fullness in each place when these two strands are properly meshed together.²⁰

16. In the context of a circuit, therefore, lay officers, deacons and formal bodies participate and have a proper role in the oversight of the people of God as they engage in worship and mission. They share in the oversight of both the gathering and the dispersing aspects of mission. They do so together with the Superintendent and any other presbyters who are appointed to fulfil their pastoral responsibility in the circuit or in connection with it. If only one presbyter is appointed to a circuit she or he is automatically the Superintendent.²¹ If more than one presbyter is appointed to a circuit they collectively exercise pastoral responsibility across the whole circuit, but one will exercise her or his presbyteral ministry in the form of the particular functions of a Superintendent.²²
17. Presbyters have a particular role in the shared oversight of the people of God as the people gather and disperse in mission and worship. That role is, amongst other things, one of presiding over the people in the sense of being the representative, focal point, animator and guide amongst them. This does not, however, mean that they have to rule over every situation or chair every meeting, and there may well be lay or ordained colleagues who are better able to perform those functions without taking away from the role of the presbyter in the situation.²³ Presbyters exercise this role of presiding in and through their ministries of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility. It is the collective role of all the presbyters in the circuit, both those appointed to the circuit to undertake ministerial duties within it²⁴ and also those stationed in the circuit to serve in contexts beyond the gathered congregations which constitute it.

²⁰ For the role of the Conference in the oversight of the Connexion and for the two strands in the ways of expressing oversight on behalf of the Conference throughout the Connexion see paragraphs 2.1 to 2.27 of the report *The Nature of Oversight*.

²¹ If for any reason it is not thought fitting or practical for the only presbyter due to be appointed to a circuit to be the Superintendent, a presbyter stationed elsewhere (such as the Chair of District or the Superintendent of another circuit) is appointed to act as the Superintendent in the circuit concerned as well as fulfil his or her other role.

²² If one presbyter amongst those appointed to the circuit takes the lead in a particular piece of work or is the first point of contact for a particular part of the circuit (or even is the Superintendent!) this should not be to the detriment of the collective exercise of pastoral responsibility by all of them.

²³ The 2001 Conference referred to the Methodist Council Memorial 19 from the Bath Circuit, which asked that in certain circumstances a lay person be permitted to chair a Church Council. The 2003 Conference adopted a report from the Methodist Council which recommended that in connection with the report *What is a (Circuit) Superintendent?* detailed proposals, including Standing Order amendments, be brought to clarify the conditions under which a lay chair may be appointed. A report to this effect is included elsewhere in the Agenda of the 2005 Conference.

²⁴ A proposed revision of Standing Order 520 concerning the responsibilities of presbyters appointed to circuits to undertake ministerial duties within them can be found elsewhere in the Agenda of the 2005 Conference.

18. Superintendents exercise their share of that general collective role, but within it they also have particular responsibilities:
- They are expected to gather together any presbyters and any deacons appointed to or stationed in the circuit, and any lay workers employed in the circuit in order for them to take prayerful counsel together, support each other, supervise each other in their professional practice and develop vision. As such the Superintendents do not just (in the words of Standing Order 700 (9)) “have oversight of all the ministers, deacons and probationers stationed in the Circuit” but also allow themselves to be “watched over in love” in turn by them. In all this they are taking the lead in a group which is primarily exercising *leadership*.²⁵
 - They act as the chief officer in the Circuit Leadership Team (although someone else may be the convenor of its meetings). The Circuit Leadership Team is made up of presbyters, deacons and circuit lay officers and meets to articulate vision, to formulate recommendations for practical strategies to enact that vision, to prepare business for the Circuit Meeting and to act in the light of its decisions.²⁶ The role of Superintendents here is therefore that of taking the lead in a group which is primarily concerned with exercising *leadership* in a context of *executive management*.²⁷
 - They act as the Chair of the Circuit Meeting which is the chief source of governance and decision-making in the circuit under the Conference. In extreme circumstances this would involve them in appearing as the representative of the Circuit at any legal action or tribunal concerning the

²⁵ See further paras. 1.5–1.15 in the report *The Nature of Oversight* and 1.13 in particular. Leadership is defined there as

- inspiring people to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision, and empowering them to share their ideas and act upon them
- articulating and considering the content of that developing vision
- initiating action and encouraging people to follow
- providing examples of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken
- providing models of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.

These expressions of leadership are always related to the Word, rooted in the sacraments and undergirded with prayer.

²⁶ Standing Order 515(2).

²⁷ See further paras. 1.5-1.15 in the report *The Nature of Oversight* and 1.12 in particular. Management is defined there as working under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship to

- formulate specific and detailed strategies for enacting the church’s policies and fulfilling its purposes
- set particular objectives concerning the implementation of those strategies
- deploy human, financial, capital (e.g. investments and buildings) and technological resources to achieve those objectives
- monitor and assess the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the objectives

For the issue of how presbyters (including Superintendents), deacons and probationers exercise accountability for their work and ministry see paras. 26-27 below.

actions of the Circuit. The role of Superintendents here is one of taking the lead in a group which is primarily concerned with exercising *governance*.²⁸

19. Superintendents therefore have to be able to exercise their role of *oversight* in general in the form of pastoral responsibility, but also from time to time in three particular facets of *leadership*, *management* and *governance*. Which of these they are exercising at any one time will depend on the context in which they find themselves. They will often have to exercise the same general role or particular facet of oversight as is predominant in the gathering concerned. Thus they will exercise *governance* in the Circuit Meeting, which is the main governance body in the circuit. But sometimes they will have to exercise oversight or a facet of it in a way which is secondary to the main emphasis of the particular gathering in order that that gathering can fulfil its primary purpose. Thus when Superintendents preside at Staff Meetings they are exercising *management* to enable the meeting to exercise *leadership*, whilst at the same time they are participating as a “first amongst equals” or “leader amongst peers” in the exercise of leadership and in the mutual support and supervision. It is therefore important that Superintendents are able to recognise the differences between these different facets, and can develop the wisdom and the skill to exercise them appropriately, whilst also ensuring that they remain integrated.
20. The same is also true about the contexts and different types of gathering themselves. It is important that the participants generally and Superintendents in particular are able to define the intentions of the different types of gathering and ensure that their boundaries are not transgressed. Where presbyters and other circuit staff ostensibly meet to take counsel but inadvertently or deliberately allow that to become a matter of decision-making or an exercise of governance from which others with a proper role to play (for example, the Circuit Stewards or the Circuit Meeting) are excluded, tensions and power-struggles may arise in the circuit and the proper exercise of oversight go by default. Part of the particular role of the Superintendent is to ensure that this does not happen, and that governance and the making of executive or management decisions occur in the proper places.²⁹

²⁸ See paras. 1.5-1.15 in the report *The Nature of Oversight* and 1.11 in particular. Governance is defined there as exercising formal authority in

- formulating and adopting the principal purposes and policies of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit
- setting parameters for the implementation of those policies
- making rules and regulations for itself and its constituent parts which direct and guide their activities and their relationships with other churches and the wider world
- ensuring that the connexion complies with both its internal regulations (e.g. Standing Orders, doctrinal standards) and external legislation (e.g. accounting rules, Charity law, data protection)
- monitoring and assessing the fulfilment of its agreed purposes under the guidance of the Spirit.

For the issue of how presbyters (including Superintendents), deacons and probationers are appointed to circuits and assigned to particular duties and tasks of pastoral work within them see para. 25 below.

²⁹ See also paras 3.1-3.12 in the report *The Nature of Oversight*.

21. There are some dangers inherent in this. On the one hand, when Superintendents exercise their pastoral responsibility they may do so in a way that attributes to them a great deal of authority and entails the exercise of a lot of power. On the other, they are working in a Church which, as the report *The Nature of Oversight* demonstrates, bears many of the hall-marks of a voluntary organisation and where everyone else is a volunteer. This can mean that Superintendents have nobody to whom they can delegate tasks and whom they can then manage in the execution of those responsibilities. In some cases the volunteers are people who believe that they share in the responsibility of oversight in the circuit, and that the Superintendents (and any other presbyters) are the executive officers of their decisions, whereas they themselves are not bound to do what the Superintendent asks of them. That can result in Superintendents being given notional authority and power and many responsibilities, but no means of fulfilling those responsibilities except by doing everything themselves. In other cases Superintendents who have a lot of energy and personal charisma may be able to force their own ways on others unfettered. All of this can be a cause of stress and breakdown in either the Superintendent or the Circuit or both.
22. It is important that ways are developed that will guard against the Superintendent becoming an autocratic figure who acts arbitrarily and unaccountably. It is also important to find ways in which lay people are enabled to exercise a proper share of responsibility for the life and work of the Church and a proper means of accountability in so doing. The insight set out in the report *The Nature of Oversight* that in Methodism the exercise of oversight is essentially shared provides a framework in which both sets of aims can be achieved. It enables both lay and ordained to recover a proper sense and exercise of accountable discipleship which includes accountability to peers, to the local situation and to the wider connexion.

The particular responsibilities of Superintendents

23. The particular context for the ministry of Superintendents is therefore that of the circuit. Within the circuit they have to ensure that the presbyters, deacons, lay officers and the formal bodies all play their proper parts in the common task of overseeing the godly organisation of the people of God in worship and mission.
24. As noted above, in fulfilling this responsibility Superintendents exercise the same ministry of the word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility as every presbyter does. But as presbyters who are appointed to circuits in order to be Superintendents they also exercise
 - (a) their ministry of the word in the form of ensuring the provision and ordering of preaching, interpretation, apologetics and evangelism in the circuit;
 - (b) their ministry of sacrament in ensuring that there are sufficient people available to preside at sacraments, and that any probationers or lay people with authorisations to preside are properly trained and inducted into doing it;
 - (c) their ministry of pastoral responsibility in ensuring that

- (i) appropriate discussions are held before the Circuit Meeting (or the body to which it has delegated the task) decides which presbyter exercises pastoral charge where in the circuit³⁰
- (ii) there is proper organisation in the circuit so that all the groups and churches offer worship and participate in mission to the best of their ability.

To this end the Superintendent has to ensure that the relevant meetings are properly conducted, and that the formal bodies and relevant officers are fulfilling their various responsibilities, particularly legal or financial ones.

25. One aspect of their pastoral responsibility noted above is that Superintendents have a particular role towards any other presbyters, deacons and probationers appointed to or stationed in the circuit. In the words of Standing Order 700(9) they have oversight of them. This involves ensuring that they are properly organised or managed in terms of how each may best be deployed, used, provided with resources and supported. This in turn is obviously best done in consultation and collaboration with such presbyters, deacons, lay officers and formal bodies as are present in the circuit. For example, it is sometimes claimed that it is the Superintendent alone who makes decisions about which presbyter exercises pastoral charge where in a circuit, in that presbyters and probationer presbyters are appointed to circuits and not to particular churches or tasks within a circuit, and each of them is permitted to exercise his or her ministry within the parameters set by the Conference throughout the circuit and its constituent churches but always “subject... to the Superintendent” (in the words of the current SO 520). Yet Section 54 of Standing Orders makes it plain that as a matter of governance it is the Circuit Meeting or an Invitation Committee appointed by it which deal with the issuing of invitations for particular presbyters to be stationed in the circuit, and as a matter of executive management it is the circuit stewards who have the responsibility for servicing those meetings. Moreover the Guidance about stationing in Book VI Part 2 Section 1 of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD) makes it plain that as part of the matching process which leads to the circuit having to decide whether to issue an invitation to a particular presbyter, the circuit stewards (as part of their executive management of these matters for the Circuit Meeting) have to fill in a form outlining the particular responsibilities of a particular appointment within the circuit. It is therefore the Circuit Meeting which decides which presbyter exercises pastoral charge where on the basis of material provided to it by the circuit stewards. In this the responsibilities of the circuit stewards complement the proper responsibilities of the presbyters and those of the Superintendent who has oversight of them. The Circuit Leadership Team therefore provides a place in which all these concerns and insights can be brought together in the recommendations to be put to the Circuit Meeting. It is the Superintendent’s responsibility to ensure that this happens and that the Circuit Meeting makes its decisions properly. It is not, however, the Superintendent’s responsibility to make the final or exclusive decisions.³¹

³⁰ See further paragraph 25 below.

³¹ See further the proposed revision to Standing Order 520 elsewhere in the 2005 Conference Agenda.

26. The Circuit Staff Meeting provides a context in which the circuit ‘staff’ (ordained or lay) can receive supervision and support from each other and in which the Superintendent can exercise her or his oversight of the presbyters, deacons and probationers. It also provides a context in which the Superintendent can receive supervision and support, although since the Superintendent also has to ensure that the processes of exercising such accountability are properly and fairly organised, she or he needs to be skilled enough to be subject to a process for which she or he also bears responsibility.
27. Yet the Circuit Staff Meeting cannot deal with everything. Although presbyters and deacons have a primary responsibility to the Conference and the wider connexion, they exercise a secondary accountability for their work and ministry to the circuit. In one sense this involves them giving a general account to the Circuit Meeting. The Circuit Meeting’s role, however, is primarily that of governance not detailed management or supervision. That can best be done by the circuit stewards in a way which complements the Superintendent’s responsibility for oversight.³²
28. Superintendents also have a responsibility for ensuring that the gifts and skills of lay-people in the circuit are best supported and utilised in the mission of the local churches and of the circuit as a whole. Where they have ordained colleagues in the circuit staff, they will draw them in to share in this task.
29. Superintendents therefore have a crucial role to play in what the report *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* defined as considerations of how to “release circuits and all other parts of the Church’s life for mission” and how to “release ministers for ministry”.³³
30. As a result, Superintendents have a responsibility to help circuits to create strategy and policy for their worship and mission, witness and holiness. Methodism arose as a missionary movement. Wesley’s focus was upon the Spirit of God, burning like a fire in the hearts of converted individuals, renewing the Church, firing communities and spreading until scriptural holiness covered the whole earth. His vision was of the restoration and renewal of all things through grace. He sought to create imaginative training programmes, policies, structures and liturgies which channelled the released energy of the Spirit into the tangible fruit of new groups of Christians who were growing in personal and social holiness and working alongside the poor and the disadvantaged. Wesley showed that where missionary thinking and the activity of the Spirit are focussed and directed through proper strategy and structure, church maintenance can become swallowed up in mission. Superintendents should similarly be women and men of vision, with the capacity to inspire and enable the staff, the stewards and the churches of the circuit to look beyond the institution to the Kingdom of God.

³² See further *The Nature of Oversight* paras. 3.5-3.12 and 5.28.

³³ *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* 3.4.

31. In particular, therefore, the Superintendent has a responsibility to ensure that the circuit:
- (a) is helped to create a culture in which mission is the priority, growth a possibility and the grace of God the focus;
 - (b) is helped to understand both the communities and institutions served by its churches, members and staff and also the nature and activity of God, so that it can decide on its mission priorities, articulate realistic objectives and formulate appropriate strategies;
 - (c) is encouraged and enabled to review its existing organisation and resources so that it can create structures which enable the mission objectives to be achieved (this includes helping people to have the confidence to tackle long-term issues associated with such matters as staffing levels, redundant churches, ecumenical opportunities, the demographic structures of some congregations and church planting opportunities);
 - (d) is helped to open itself to the energy of the Holy Spirit, confronting oppressive traditions and protecting itself from any inappropriate demands made upon it.
32. In summary, Superintendents have a responsibility in terms of *leadership*:
- (a) to inspire people, lay and ordained, to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision by empowering them to share their ideas and act upon them;
 - (b) to encourage and enable colleagues and others to discern the work of God by stimulating theological reflection and helping people to see that they can learn from failure as well as from success;
 - (c) to provide examples of taking risks, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and a commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the action to be undertaken;
 - (d) to ensure that colleagues enable the voice of the least and lowest to be heard and the poor and disadvantaged to be included;
 - (e) to provide models of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love;
 - (f) to challenge colleagues and other who exercise power in other ways.

In terms of *management* they have a responsibility:

- (g) to ensure that after governance decisions are made by the relevant bodies (e.g. the Circuit Meeting) appropriate people, systems and strategies are set in place to enact them, and proper processes established to review them;
- (h) to ensure that human, financial, capital (e.g. investments and buildings) and technological resources are deployed to fulfil the particular objectives set for the implementation of those strategies;
- (i) to help any other presbyters appointed to and stationed in the circuit to fulfil their presbyteral role to the best of their ability and similarly,

where appropriate, to help any deacons and lay workers in the circuit to exercise their roles;

- (j) to ensure that any probationers in the circuit are appropriately inducted into the exercise of public ministry, and properly supervised, supported and assessed;
- (k) to ensure that colleagues are appropriately and adequately supervised in their professional practice³⁴.

In terms of *governance* they have a responsibility:

- (l) to ensure that all schedules and other tasks required by Standing Orders are completed³⁵;
- (m) to ensure that information is co-ordinated and thereby enable the whole circuit to participate in the processes that lead to the Circuit Meeting making policies;
- (n) to enable the Circuit Meeting to formulate policies under the guidance of the Spirit, challenging, guiding and advising it as appropriate;
- (o) to ensure that the Circuit Meeting holds itself accountable to churches in the circuit and to the wider connexion;
- (p) to ensure that the circuit adheres to and fulfils its purposes.

In terms of general *oversight* or pastoral charge they have a responsibility:

- (q) to embody in their practice to the best of their ability the values, rules and regulations of the Methodist Church, and thereby to provide a model for colleagues and the circuit;
- (r) to help the people in the circuit to develop an understanding of the proper role of presbyters (and, where appropriate, of deacons and lay-people) and of the stresses and strains which it might entail;
- (s) to help colleagues to discern which expectations or priorities of members and churches are unrealistic or irrelevant and thereby help to liberate people from them so that they can take imaginative steps of faith in the light of new missionary opportunities;
- (t) to help colleagues to inspire confidence in the Gospel of grace through their own spirituality of prayer, confidence, enthusiasm, happiness, and vulnerability and through their Bible study and theological reflection.

None of the above is the exclusive responsibility of the Superintendent alone, but part of the shared nature of oversight in which he or she has a distinctive role.

Releasing Superintendents for Superintendency

33. The Superintendent is a presbyter, but one with a particular role in the context of the circuit. She or he is looked to as an enabler of vision,

³⁴ It is the direct responsibility of circuit stewards to ensure that ministers and deacons appointed to the circuit are appropriately and adequately supported in practical ways, including the proper provision of housing, equipment and the reimbursement of expenses for each of their households.

³⁵ For a list of the formal tasks required on Superintendents in Standing Orders, see the Appendix.

leadership and co-ordination in matters affecting the life and mission of the circuit as a whole. He or she is also expected to have a 'representative' role in relation to ecumenical partners, the district and the connexion. This representative role is two-way, involving representing the circuit to these bodies, and these bodies to the circuit.

34. It is important that the Superintendent has the time and space to fulfil these roles, and that they are not just left as responsibilities to be fulfilled over and above the full work-load of a presbyter. One implication of this is that if it is proposed that a presbyter already appointed to a circuit should become the Superintendent this should be treated as a new appointment to the circuit for that presbyter,³⁶ and there should be a new profile drawn up which states how her or his other responsibilities in the circuit are to be adapted to make this possible. The circuit should also ensure that there is adequate voluntary or paid administrative support for the work of the circuit, and of the Superintendent within the circuit.
35. There is no single way of living out presbyteral ministry as a Superintendent. It is important to emphasise this because it is sometimes claimed that there is a prevailing autocratic, male-dominated model of being a Superintendent which makes some ministers (men as well as women) disinclined to take up the role voluntarily. It is also sometimes claimed that some ministers are put off by the large number of responsibilities which they feel have to be fulfilled by the Superintendent alone. But as noted above, it is the responsibility of the Superintendent not to do all these things himself or herself but to ensure that they are done. This has to be done with due regard to the gifts and graces which God has given to each person appointed to the office, but also to those which God has given to others (lay and ordained) in the circuit. The possibilities may, of course, vary from circuit to circuit, depending on factors such as whether it is small or large, urban or rural. Once it has been clearly established that the Superintendent is the lead figure in the exercise of the presbyteral role in the circuit, many of the particular functions of leadership which express that role can be undertaken by others, lay or ordained, as appropriate and as their gifts suggest. For example, a lay or ordained colleague could deal with the making of the preaching plan. Another ordained presbyter could undertake the instruction and supervision of any probationers or others granted an authorisation to preside at the sacraments. A named deputy, lay or ordained, could take the chair at many meetings.³⁷ This would release the Superintendent from having to attend all meetings, whilst retaining the right for her or him to be present when judged necessary.
36. Depending, therefore, on the particular gifts or skills of the Superintendent, some of the tasks for which the Superintendent is formally responsible are better shared with other people. Sometimes Superintendents may take initiatives and fulfil the tasks themselves for a time and thereby release others in the circuit to do other things. In either case a Superintendent needs to be:

³⁶ Such an appointment should be for an initial five years, unless a shorter period is agreed under SO 543 (3).

³⁷ Proposals are brought in the 2005 Conference Agenda to enable lay deputies to be appointed to chair Church Councils.

- (a) spiritually and theologically aware;
 - (b) highly sensitive to the way she or he interacts with others;
 - (c) able to negotiate collaborative working and mutual accountability;
 - (d) adept at promoting inclusiveness in terms of multi-ethnicity, ecumenism, inter-disciplinary working and issues of ability and disability;
 - (e) able to create space for creativity, sensitivity and awareness within the circuit and agencies in the wider community, and to share the fruits of theological reflection with them.
37. The style by which Superintendents fulfil their responsibilities will vary according to their personalities, the personalities of those with whom they have to interact, and the expectations of people in the particular context in which they are stationed. In some situations Superintendents will not be able to fulfil all that they and others would ideally like. Experience shows that although they often feel guilty about this, the reasons are more often to do with the situation in which they are placed and the systems with which they have to deal. Superintendents therefore in their turn require help, support, supervision and training in undertaking their role. The 'good practice' which is set out here is intended to provide tools and encouragement for this. Superintendents are not acclaimed but formed and trained.

APPENDIX

Some duties of a Superintendent specified in Standing Orders

The requirements of Standing Orders have to be borne in mind when considering the theological and practical responsibilities laid upon Superintendents. The following list is not exhaustive, but sets out some of the major considerations.

1. General responsibilities

- 1.1 The Superintendent is required to visit all churches in the Circuit to provide encouragement, challenge and support [S.O.522], and to ensure that weekly staff meetings are convened [S.O.523]. It is her or his duty to keep the Chairman informed about stationing needs in the Circuit [S..O.782(1)].
- 1.2 The Circuit Stewards are responsible, with the Superintendent and staff appointed to the Circuit, for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit, and for upholding and acting upon the decisions of the Circuit Meeting [S.O.531(1)]. It is assumed that the Superintendent will ensure that such decisions do not conflict with the requirements of standing orders.
- 1.3 The Superintendent is responsible, in consultation with colleagues, for making the Circuit Plan [S.O.521]. This ensures that those responsible for leading worship are subject to the discipline of the Church as far as doctrine and training are concerned.
- 1.4 Membership returns must be reported to the Synod Secretary by the Superintendent [S.O.054(12)].

2. Chairing Meetings

- 2.1 The Superintendent has the right to chair every official meeting within the Circuit and its local churches. A deputy may be appointed in writing, normally a minister appointed to the Circuit or an adjoining Circuit, to preside over a Circuit Meeting or Church Council [S.O.502]
- 2.2 Lay persons appointed to chair other committees must be approved by the Circuit Meeting or Church Council concerned [S.O.502]
- 2.3 Circuit meetings and committees shall be convened only after consultation with the Superintendent. [S.O.502(5)].

3. Candidates and Probationers

- 3.1 The Superintendent is responsible for ascertaining and assuring the Connexion that a candidate for the (presbyteral) ministry or the diaconate assents to the Methodist Church's doctrinal standards, is willing to uphold its discipline and be available for stationing, and, if a candidate for the diaconate, is willing to accept the commitments entailed in becoming a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order. [S.O 710(3) and 711]
- 3.2 The Superintendent is responsible with the circuit staff and circuit stewards for ensuring that the required reports about a ministerial or diaconal probationer's progress are submitted. [S.O.725(4)(a)(i) and 725(5)(a)(i)].

4. Finance and Property

- 4.1 The Superintendent is responsible for ensuring that all funds in a Circuit and its Local Churches are audited or independently examined, and that reports are made to the Circuit Meeting or the appropriate Church Council [S.O.012(4)].
- 4.2 The Superintendent is responsible for the care and custody of deeds and documents relating to circuit and local church property. Such deeds and documents are to be inspected annually by the Superintendent and a circuit steward or other official of the circuit. [S.O.903(3)].
- 4.3 Manse Inspection Reports must be presented to the Superintendent who is required to make such reports available to be seen by the occupants of the manses concerned [S.O.965].
- 4.4 If permission is granted by the trustees for masonic services to be held on Methodist premises, it must be public worship the contents of which must be seen and approved by the Superintendent, and the worship must be conducted by a person appointed by the Superintendent [S.O.928].
- 4.5 Dramatic licences must be agreed by the Superintendent [S.O.926].

*****RESOLUTION**

- 8/1. The Conference adopts the Report.