

Basic Information

Title	The Faith and Order Committee
Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Peter M. Phillips, Secretary to the Faith and Order Committee faithandorder@btconnect.com
Status of Paper	Final
Resolutions	Can be found at the end of each section of the Report

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To report on the work of the Committee in 2009–10, and to present some of its fruits for further consultation and discussion.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ways of Working [Section A] ● Responses requested by the Conference [Section B] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Draft Service for the Ordination of Presbyters and Deacons</i> ➤ <i>Revision of the Conference Memorial Service</i> ➤ <i>The New Hymn Collection</i> ➤ <i>Eucharistic Presidency (including an Appendix to be presented for reflection and response)</i> ➤ <i>Interchangeability</i> ➤ <i>NOM203/Extreme Groups/Racism</i> ➤ <i>Updated Statement on Abortion</i> ➤ <i>Embracing the Covenant</i> ● Scrutiny and Consultancy Work [Section B] ● Working Parties and Ecumenical Joint Projects [Section B] ● Report of the Membership Working Party [Section C]
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	As set out in each Section of the Report

Section A

1. Ways of Working

- 1.1 The Faith and Order Committee continued to work out the new patterns of collaborative working through the network and through focussing on early consultation with working parties and areas of work within the Connexional Team thus attempting to limit the need for late intervention.
- 1.2 In 2010, a number of new members were brought into the network either to replace retiring members or to provide resources in missing areas. The new members of the network were recruited along the lines of our Equality and Diversity Strategy. The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee is willing to accept recommendations of people to join the Network or Committee, especially from male or female deacons and lay people from across the wide spectrum of the Methodist family.
- 1.3 The appointment of the main Faith and Order Committee is the responsibility of the Methodist Conference and names for appointment are offered formally elsewhere in the Conference agenda. In 2010–2011, a number of minor changes are being proposed. The Revd Dr David Chapman is nominated to replace The Revd Gareth Powell as convenor for the Ecumenical Resource Group. In turn, Gareth Powell will replace David Walton as the representative from the Law and Polity Committee. We are sad that David will be leaving the Committee this summer owing to commitments elsewhere as the new Chair of the Methodist Council. We will miss David's contributions to the Committee which have always been relevant and perceptive.
- 1.4 The committee has met three times since the Wolverhampton Conference of 2009 – in July for a one day meeting to establish items for consideration through the year; in November for a 24-hour residential meeting which was extended by a further 12 hours to consider the new hymn collection; and in March for a 24-hour residential meeting.
- 1.5 The Committee has maintained its active links with many other bodies internal and external to the Methodist Church (Church of England Liturgical Commission, Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity and Mission (MAPUM), Churches Together in England – Theology and Unity Group, European Methodist Theological Commission, Faith and Order Advisory Group [of the Church of England], Joint Liturgical Group).
- 1.6 We are currently engaged in three major ecumenical projects with the Church of England – a joint working party exploring the ecclesiology of fresh expressions of Church (*JAMWPEEEEC*), a joint consultation on the role of the diaconate, and a proposal for the Faith and Order Committee to meet jointly with the new Church of England Faith and Order Commission in September 2011.

***RESOLUTION

28/1. The Conference received Section A of the Report.

Section B

2. Responses requested by Conference

2.1 The Committee has been working on a number of responses to specific Conference resolutions relating to the work of the Committee.

2.2 *Draft Service for the Ordination of Presbyters and Deacons*

This document was drafted within the Worship and Liturgy Resource Group but after considerable alteration by the Main Committee and in consultation with the Methodist

Diaconal Order, the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster and the Governance Support Cluster, a final version was agreed in March 2010. This service will be held at Winchester Cathedral on the opening Sunday of the Conference. The Committee is happy to receive comments on the service from those who were present or who took some part in it. The Committee remains somewhat divided with some members of the Committee welcoming this pragmatic response to ordinands' personal situations and others preferring to keep the Ordinals separate. It is likely that this range of views represents a wider range across the Connexion, upon which Conference may choose to comment.

2.3 Revision of the Conference Memorial Service

A new draft of the Memorial Service was developed within the Worship and Liturgy Resource Group but it was decided to continue for the time being with the slight alteration made to last year's service and give a longer period of reflection before suggesting any revision.

2.4 The New Hymn Collection

A good deal of the Committee's workload this year has centred on reviewing and scrutinising the new collection. This has meant a considerable amount of work for the Network and Committee and the development of a great deal of internal paperwork by the administrator and secretary. A summary of the findings of the Committee was agreed at the residential meeting and forwarded to the Music Resource Group (MRG). Similarly the MRG provided a response to this in time for the March meeting where further amendments to the Collection and additions to it were then considered. The iterative process of sending reports between the Music Resource Group and the Faith and Order Committee after each meeting has been profitable in that we now agree on the vast majority of items in the collection. Both committees have taken the effort to make their recommendations clear and to offer further information where needed. Continued conversations will be held in the preparations for Conference and, it is to be hoped, through the Reference Group process adopted by the Conference.

2.5 Eucharistic Presidency

In its reply to Memorial 18 (and 19 and 20) 2009, Conference directed "the Faith and Order Committee to review the interpretation of Clause 4 of the Deed of Union found in SO 011 and the Guidance material found in Book VI Part 8 [*sc. of The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD)*] in the light of previous reports and memorials on this issue. Recognising the practical and ecumenical dimensions of the subject, and the anomaly of deacons receiving lay authorisations, the Conference further directs that this review should include consultation with the Authorisations Committee, the Joint Implementation Commission and the Methodist Diaconal Order."

In response, the Faith and Order Committee agreed to develop a threefold approach:

1. a paper outlining the background to the issues being raised;
2. consultation with the Authorisations Committee, Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) and the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO);
3. an exploration of the issues surrounding Eucharistic Presidency within the context of Fresh Expressions of Church.

The resulting paper was presented to the Faith and Order Committee in March and a consultation process begun with the Authorisations Committee, JIC and MDO. We have been unable to provide enough consultation time for all the parties involved for this issue to be resolved at this Conference. As such, we provide section 1 of this paper in an appendix to this section. Faith and Order are willing to take this opportunity to open up the consultation process even further. Comments are invited on the two sections in the appendix and should be sent to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee at the email address at the end of

the paper by the end of October 2010.

2.6 *Interchangeability*

The Faith and Order Committee have discussed this item at every meeting this year and maintained close ties with the processes happening within JIC. We are content that the progress being made in JIC means that no report is needed from Faith and Order on this matter for the time being.

2.7 *NOM203/Extreme Groups/Racism*

The development of this report was undertaken by a working party drawn from among the Connexional Team. Faith and Order were represented on this group and contributed to the paper accepted by the Methodist Council in February and to be recommended to Conference in 2010.

2.8 *Updated Statement on Abortion*

The Faith and Order Committee offered some reflections on the paper presented to the Methodist Council in February 2010. A number of Faith and Order resource groups were unhappy with the proposals and as such an alternative way forward was proposed to the Council by the working party responsible for the paper.

2.9 *Embracing the Covenant*

A draft response was developed through the Faith and Order Network and considered at the Committee's March meeting. After further amendment, the report was submitted to the Joint Implementation Commission for consideration.

3. Working Parties and Ecumenical Joint Projects:

The Faith and Order committee has developed and is currently engaged in the following working parties:

- ***Pastoral Care Working Party*** – in response to *Integrity and Skill*
- ***Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of Church***
- ***Multi-lateral Diaconal Conversations***
- ***Proposed Joint meeting of F&O and FAOC, September 2011***

4. Scrutiny and Consultancy Work

4.1 The Committee has engaged with the following issues/projects/Council papers, offering specific responses to paperwork, continuing involvement in the support of a working group, or commentary on the development of reports. The Secretary of the Committee has had regular meetings with the Head of the Projects Research and Development Cluster, Trevor Durston, to determine appropriate and helpful ways for Faith and Order to comment on specific project proposals and developments. Where appropriate, specific responses have been sent either to the Cluster Head/Strategic Leader, or directly to the authors of specific reports, or to those providing the lead in these areas of work:

- Discipleship
- Working Party on the role of President/Vice-President
- Fundraising Policy for the Methodist Church
- Living Wage (working with the Joint Public Issues Team)
- Hope in God's Future Study Pack
- Signalling Vocation: Possible Clause 4 Amendment
- Faith and Work Papers – Philip Bee as F&O representative

- Projects – in development or under review
 - Evaluation of Team Focus
 - Inspire
 - Inter-Faith Relations
 - Women’s Network
 - Chaplaincy – Andrew Sails as F&O representative
 - Belonging Together – Sylvester Deigh as F&O representative
 - Extending Covenant Discipleship
 - Missing Generation
 - One Connexion
 - Education Commission – Luke Curran as F&O representative
 - Venture FX
 - Our Calling, My calling

*****RESOLUTIONS**

28/2. The Conference received Section B of the Report.

28/3. The Conference commended the Appendix that follows Section B for consultation across the Connexion, specifically including Districts, the Fresh Ways Working Group, the Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of Church, and the Fresh Expressions Connexional Missioner.

APPENDIX TO SECTION B

Draft Response to Memorials on Eucharistic Presidency

Two draft sections of the proposed report are offered for the purpose of consultation

Please submit comments to:

Secretary to the Faith and Order Committee
 St John’s College
 Durham
 DH1 3SJ
 p.m.phillips@durham.ac.uk or faithandorder@btconnect.com

The following sections are only in draft form:

DRAFT OF A POSSIBLE FAITH AND ORDER RESPONSE TO MEMORIALS 18, 19 & 20 FROM CONFERENCE 2009

The Wolverhampton Conference of 2009 received three memorials concerning Eucharistic Presidency. The texts of these memorials (M18, M19 and M20) is given below:

M18 Authorisation to preside at Communion

The Erewash Valley (22/20) Circuit Meeting (Present: 28. Voting: 24 for, 0 against) in view of the declining number of Presbyters within the Connexion requests the Conference to explore the possibility of a more flexible system of local preachers being authorised to administer Holy Communion.

M19 Authorisation to preside at Communion

The Kent Thameside (36/21) Circuit Meeting (Present 51. Voting: unanimous) celebrates the good news that many lay-led fresh expressions of church are growing and forming Christian community

together. In view of the challenging and culturally complex situations of these cutting edge projects, it is desirable that the fresh expression pioneer be equipped and affirmed by the Methodist Church to offer a full sacramental life to these developing and fragile communities.

In light of the drive towards innovative fresh expressions of church and the necessity of pioneering leaders in the outworking of this priority (many of whom are lay people who have no explicit call to formal ordination within the Methodist Church), the Kent Thameside Circuit requests that Conference reconsiders the grounds on which a dispensation to preside at the Lord's Supper is granted. In particular, it requests that that mission as well as pastoral deprivation be considered a valid basis on which a dispensation could be granted, subject to the proper consideration of the District Policy Committee.

The Kent Thameside Circuit therefore requests that a report examining this issue be brought to the Conference of 2010 for its consideration.

M20 Authorisation to preside at Communion

The North Lancashire Synod (R) (Present: 143. Voting: unanimous) recognising the great variety of contexts for ministry and mission into which many presbyteral probationers are now rightly stationed; and noting that the Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Ministers to Preside at the Lord's Supper (CPD pp.825–826) were last reviewed more than a decade ago, when 'Probationer Appointments' were assumed to fit a relatively standard circuit appointment model, requests that the Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to review the current criteria and suggest what changes, if any, should be made in the light of the range of new situations within which our presbyteral probationers are now helping to lead our work, witness and worship.

Conference responded to all three memorials as follows:

“The Conference acknowledges that its guidance on this issue is now a decade old, and recognises the increasing fluidity of presbyteral roles within the Methodist Church and the mission imperative incumbent on all Circuits. It therefore directs the Faith and Order Committee to review the interpretation of Clause 4 of the Deed of Union found in SO 011 and the Guidance material found in Book VI Part 8 in the light of previous reports and memorials on this issue. Recognising the practical and ecumenical dimensions of the subject, and the anomaly of deacons receiving lay authorisations, the Conference further directs that this review should include consultation with the Authorisations Committee, the Joint Implementation Commission and the Methodist Diaconal Order.

The Conference therefore refers the Memorial to the Faith and Order Committee for report to the Conference of 2010.”

In response, the Faith and Order Committee agreed to develop a threefold approach.

1. A paper outlining the background to the issues being raised (Section 1 below)
2. Consultation with the Authorisations Committee, JIC and MDO (Section 2 below)
3. An exploration of the issues surrounding Eucharistic Presidency within the context of Fresh Expressions of Church (Section 3 below)

Section 1: Presidency at the Lord's Supper: An Overview

A Summary and Reminder of Decisions/Principles agreed by Past Conferences.

- 1.1 There are contradictory convictions or at least widely varied convictions and considerable diversity over the issue of presidency at the Lord's Supper in British Methodism. In 1932, the doctrine of ministry and the administration of the sacraments were a considerable part of the negotiations for union as different practices and convictions were brought together. There

are some in the Methodist Church who believe there should be no authorisations given at all, with nothing allowed other than presbyteral presidency. Some believe authorisations should be much more freely available, and possibly decided upon locally rather than by Conference. And many in between ...

1.2 Questions about eucharistic presidency have been raised many times over the years: there have been many memorials to Conference and a number of reports on the subject. However, Conference has consistently, since 1932, held to the 'original settlement' which established presbyteral presidency as 'general usage' with authorisations of others (members, probationers, deacons) in cases where people would be deprived of the opportunity to celebrate Holy Communion as frequently as they would wish. Given the different convictions continuing within the Methodist Church, the Faith and Order Committee does not see any overwhelming reason to believe Conference would radically depart from that position now.

1.3 The memorials and discussion that have called for change largely fall into three areas:

- arguments for expanding the availability of authorisations;
- the extent to which probationers should be treated as a different category;
- the definition of 'deprivation' and how the criteria for giving authorisations are worked in practice.

Three memorials on this subject to the 2009 Conference represent current versions of these arguments:

- more authorisations are needed because of a shortage of presbyters (M18);
- authorisations are needed for lay-led fresh expressions pioneers (M19);
- the variety of presbyteral probationer appointments should be a factor in giving automatic authorisation to presbyteral probationers (a version of the argument that probationers should be in a different category) (M20).

1.4 Despite calls for authorisations to preside to be decided in a Circuit or District, Conference has consistently affirmed that the decision should be taken at Conference, thereby being a *connexional* decision. The authority of the Conference as an expression of connexionalism is a key principle of who we are as Methodists.

1.5 The celebration of the Lord's Supper in any particular congregation or Christian community is linked to the celebration of the whole Church, which is why people who are representative of the whole church and the Methodist connexion are usually the ones to preside at that celebration, specifically set aside for a ministry of word and sacrament and pastoral charge, i.e. presbyters.

1.6 The Circuit context is also crucial. Provision for ministry, including the ministry of word and sacrament, is made to and by Circuits. All Christian congregations and communities that want to be identified as Methodist are linked to one another in this way. We do not privilege the local congregation to the extent that some other churches do.

1.7 The 1996 report, *Authorisation to Preside at the Lord's Supper*, in particular tackled what were seen as popular misconceptions about:

- the priesthood of all believers;
- the link between pastoral responsibility and presiding.

1.8 In a number of reports, the views of our ecumenical partners – both those who restrict presidency entirely to presbyters and those who make much wider use of lay presidency – have been named as important, but not necessarily decisive for us.

1.9 There have been changes made over the years, but relatively minor ones: guidelines have shifted from seeing monthly communion as the basic rule of thumb to using that as minimum, with encouragement to make a case to the Authorisations Committee where congregations

want more frequent celebrations (1984). In 1994, attention was drawn to the possibilities of extended communion.

1.10 All of these points have been made before and argued out in detail in other documents:

- reports to Conference in 1984, 1994, 1996
- *Called to Love and Praise*
- *In the Spirit of the Covenant* – with a much more detailed explanation of the historical issues.

Specific question for review

1.11 SO 011 deals with the process of applying for an authorisation. Given the decisions Conference has made in the past to endorse reports and replies to memorials re-affirming presbyteral presidency as general usage and authorisations in cases of deprivation, the basic relation between clause 4 statements on ministry and SO 011 should be relatively uncontroversial.

1.12 Perhaps, though, the full potential of SO 011 (1) is not always appreciated.

“A Circuit which considers that any of its churches or a significant number of church members or other Christians in the local community is deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper through lack of ministers may apply for the authorisation of persons other than ministers to preside at that sacrament ...”

- ‘A Circuit which considers. ...’ – the onus is on the Circuit, or the opportunity is given to the Circuit, to make a case.
- ‘... or a significant number of church members’ – the pastoral needs of those who are part of a congregation but cannot attend church clearly count here: those who are housebound, those who want to be able to celebrate Holy Communion for church members in hospital.
- ‘... or other Christians in the local community’ – that includes services in residential homes, perhaps some school situations. *This could be applicable to many fresh expressions contexts as well.*

1.13 Fresh expressions may develop in all sorts of ways and celebrating the Lord’s Supper is not likely to be high on the list at first, but such a need may develop. The wording of the standing order does not need changing in order for these contexts to be ‘counted’ within what the Circuit considers the need to be though the reason for an authorisation remains only lack of ministers (presbyters). What is not feasible under this standing order and its interpretation of clause 4 of the Deed of Union is an argument that runs like this: ‘the lay leader of this fresh expression needs to be the one who presides in this community’. Conference has refused that possibility in circumstances such as lay workers appointed to have significant pastoral responsibility in a local congregation. The issue is most closely addressed in the 1996 report to Conference. The reason for refusing the automatic link between presidency at communion and pastoral relationship to a congregation is that the Circuit and the connexion are the context in which all congregations and Christian communities operate within Methodism, i.e. this is the kind of Church we are. The provision of ministry in Methodism (see *The Missional Nature of the Circuit*), is made by Conference through the Circuit – including the provision for the ministry of word and sacrament.

1.14 Book VI Part 8 – Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Ministers to Preside at the Lord’s Supper

The criteria clearly privilege deprivation as *the* (only) reason for authorisations – following exactly on from SO 011. They have been criticised for being ‘just a mathematical calculation’, but they have one key element of flexibility: it is for the Circuit to define the number of communions that it wants, not simply at Sunday services. “The statement of the

number of services requested should be based on what the Circuit would like, not what it can currently have.” There is encouragement to think of this in conjunction with e.g. residential homes. There is no reason not to include fresh expressions communities or emerging churches explicitly here.

1.15 The ‘missionary situations’ criterion

In 1986, the report to Conference entitled ‘The granting of authorisations to preside at the Lord’s Supper to persons other than ministers’ gathered together decisions made in 1984 and 1985 and reminded Conference that there were three criteria used in judging whether an authorisation should be granted for someone other than a minister (presbyter) to preside at the Lord’s Supper. They were

- (a) basic “deprivation” [the criterion found then in Standing Order O11];
- (b) the desire for more frequent Holy Communion;
- (c) missionary potential.

The last two of these were not then codified in Standing Orders.

1.16 The 1986 Conference noted the existence of the three criteria and the ways in which they were applied, but took no further action at that point. Memorials to the Conference in 1992 and 1993 led to a report to the Conference in 1994 which the Conference commended to the connexion for discussion and response. As a result a further report was brought to the 1996 Conference. It surveyed the responses and then argued that

- (a) neither the New Testament, nor the Reformers, nor the Deed of Union support the argument that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers requires that Methodism should abandon its usage that that presidency at the Lord’s Supper should normally be by an ordained presbyter;
- (b) no-one has a right of themselves to preside, but only those who are authorised by the Church to do so: ministers are so authorised by their ordination, and others may be authorised by the act of the Conference;
- (c) the relationship between a lay person undertaking pastoral work with a congregation and the members of that congregation does not require or make it appropriate that that person presides at the Lord’s Supper in that congregation;
- (d) ecumenical considerations are not of themselves indicating that the Methodist Church should change its policy in any particular direction on these matters.

1.17 The culmination of the work was (together with a discussion of the role of probationer ministers in these matters) brought to the 1997 Conference. The 1997 report sought to find a way of meshing the second and third criteria set out above with that of ‘deprivation’. It did so by proposing a way of discerning whether the criterion of “deprivation” was met which took account of evidence of a desire for more frequent Holy Communion and of missionary potential. This led to the amendment of SO O11 into its current form and the introduction of the criteria in Book VI Part 8 of CPD.

1.18 The criterion of “missionary potential” might however bear revisiting. The 1986 report stated the following:

“The Report of the Faith and Order committee to the conference of 1985 recommended the following criteria to be applied in relation to ‘missionary situations’.

1. *The situation should have missionary potential. There is no case for an authorisation simply to maintain an existing, static society. Missionary potential can be identified by such features as: large numbers of unchurched people, absence of denominational rivalry, a Methodist community which is outward looking and organised for mission with progressive leadership, evidence of circuit and district support for such a mission, and signs of growth.*
2. *The area to be served should be isolated, not necessarily by distance, but by planning, traffic, economic, cultural or other factors which prevent that free-flow of ministries which is one of the traditional marks of circuit life.*

3. *The lay person to whom the authorisation is granted should be a person representative of the church, identified with the 'isolated area', living with it, and having a position of leadership in worship and mission as envisaged under S.O. 581.*
4. *It should be clearly reflected in the policy of the circuit that no permanence can be given to what is, in our usage, a short term arrangement."*

1.19 It is not difficult to see that these criteria could be slightly re-written to emphasise the cultural specificity issues which are often raised around fresh expressions (rather than the 'isolated' geographical community model which is the basic paradigm of these criteria, even though cultural 'isolation' is recognised as possible), and to name something like fresh expressions pioneers in point 3. This could be closest to an argument that the relationship of the leader to the community is taken into account. Point 4 is positively helpful in the present context, because it could recognise the interim nature of arrangements for a new Christian community which is expected to move on and change further. It is certainly needed if the potential of point 3 could be allowed without being abused.

1.20 It could be argued that all this is possible already, simply by a Circuit making a clear case that these situations are part of what it 'would like' in terms the number of services. But there is also a case for adding criteria such as these 'back into' Part 8, to make the connection to mission much clearer.

Section 2: Consultation with others

Draft section not released.

Section 3: Presidency at The Lord's Supper and Fresh Expressions

The Faith and Order Committee were aware, not least through its engagement with the Fresh Ways Working Group and the Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of Church (JAMWPEEEEC), that issues of Presidency were particularly acute within fresh expressions of Church. Issues here relate to the importance of lay leadership within many fresh expressions, the level of disengagement with traditional structures and practices, and a resistance to those traditional structures 'taking over/colonising' such a central aspect of the emerging worship life of the fresh expression.

The Committee decided to engage in a reflective listening process whereby one of the Committee members asked leaders of fresh expressions how they responded to these issues. The responses are summarised in the first point under each heading below. Two other members of the Committee then offered an initial response to these points and these are summarised in the second point under each heading. As such, there begins here a dialogue between different points of view rather than a finished statement of an official Methodist position. Further reflection will be needed by a number of parties: fresh expression practitioners, Fresh Ways Working Group, JAMWPEEEEC, the Faith and Order Committee.

- 3.1 There are several overlapping issues at the heart of discussions about presidency at Holy Communion in the context of a Fresh Expression. The views expressed here were gathered in several conversations with people active in different types of Fresh Expression. Since the diverse gatherings act as 'church' to those who attend, the word 'church' is used to describe what is happening when people gather to worship, though its form and location would be irregular to many Methodists.
- 3.2 In the following exploration, the main point is explored and then some alternative reflections are offered. Throughout the following exchange, the strong resistance to a 'Connexional' view of the Church should be noted. There was a strong preference, not limited to the context of Fresh Expressions, to focus on a congregational, local approach at the expense of the Connexional. This suggests that documents such as *Called to Love and Praise* no longer reflect or inform the ecclesiology of local Methodists. This point was also raised in the *One*

Connexion project report and may suggest that further work is needed to re-assert the statement's importance in the life of the Methodist Church.

3.3 Leadership

3.3.1 Fresh Expressions frequently have lay leaders. Some projects were established by this founder member and others became leaders as the church evolved. Circuit plans that acknowledge the timing and frequency of services in these settings, also give contact details for the decision makers and organisers of the churches i.e. the leaders. Authority is invested in these people by the circuit and the congregations. The emotional and logistical impact of being unable to preside at communion is experienced as a huge tension between what is acknowledged on the one hand and denied on the other. There is a perceived undermining of authority in having to invite 'an outsider' to preside. One leader felt that the move to keep ordained ministers as those who could preside at communion was more about tradition than either the moving of the Spirit or scripture. It feels like human power and control and a clinging on to the idea of being set-apart, by the minority who need the affirmation that this brings.

Was it not possible with the practice of local ordination within Primitive Methodism? What about these issues and developments with the new Venture FX Pioneers?

3.3.2 However there is an important issue about what authority has been given to these leaders and by whom and how that authority relates to that assigned to the office of presbyter within the Connexional structures, or indeed in relation to others within the life of the Circuit – what authority is given to local preachers, class meetings, pastoral visitors? In what way would the authority given to Fresh Expression lay leaders result in a presumption to preside at the Lord's Supper whilst such a presumption would not arise from the authority given to a worship leader?

It should be noted that ordination is not a local event but rather an authorisation by the Connexion that someone be ordained as a member of the order of presbyters within the whole Church of God. How does this relate to 'local ordination' or 'direct ordination' for a specific Fresh Expression?

3.4 Accountability

3.4.1 Despite the tensions expressed, those in church leadership positions in Fresh Expressions do seek Methodist accountability and recognition. Thus 'going on the plan' is affirming and valued. Many of the leaders are lifelong Methodists and may be local preachers and have a personal sense of belonging to the Methodist tradition. A sense of being accountable is desired and desirable. Some leaders have had a strong sense of being called into lay ministry whilst working, thus enabling them better to relate to the gathered church when it meets. There is a hope that the wider church can learn something from the vibrancy, immediacy and local engagement of these churches and that something about mutual accountability can begin to bear fruit.

3.4.2 It is clear that the appreciation of lay ministry remains strong within the life of the Church. However, it would be good to explore further how a specifically lay ministry might be differentiated from ordained ministries. Is it just an issue of full- or part-time? Is there a way of differentiating between 'lay' and 'ordained' ministries without those involved feeling value judgments are being made between the two?

3.5 Hospitality

3.5.1 The sharing of food and drink is a common ingredient to the experience of being church and, in at least one case, part of the gathering each week. The recognition that 'all are welcome at his table' indicated that open hospitality was very important and that welcome and

sharing were integral to all forms of devotional and social activity. In this sense, perhaps 'pizza and beer' was also becoming sacramental in some ways ... One view would be that sharing a meal was closer to what Christ did at the Last Supper and all sharing of food within the fellowship was 'in remembrance of him'.

3.5.2 However, there is an alternative view which has been more prevalent within the Christian Church – namely that while all meals and hospitality reflect central Christian values, the celebration of the sacraments go further – all meals may be sacramental but they are not the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In these terms, without diminishing the importance of sharing table-fellowship with one another, the Church has traditionally argued for the celebration of Holy Communion in terms of sharing in the experience of the whole Church – see *His Presence Makes the Feast*. There is a known lack of engagement with the teaching of the Church on what Holy Communion is in the church in general. In what ways might the whole church be helped to understand Communion more fully and the role of the presbyter in the presidency of Communion without limiting the importance of table fellowship?

3.6 Suitability

3.6.1 The strengths of Fresh Expression lie heavily within the field of relationships. Personal integrity, welcome, sincerity and accountability to the new group are valued attributes. Those who currently include an act of communion within the programme of worship life, do so very rarely ('we'd like to have one a year ...') and with carefully invited presbyters. There is a common thought that 'not everyone would be credible'. Thus, many ministers are automatically excluded because they represent a church which is 'prejudiced, ageist, bigoted, homophobic, sexist ...'

The act of worship is also an issue. There is a view that standard liturgies are not, for example, youth friendly. There is a perception that this means communion cannot be celebrated i.e. no awareness of the range of liturgical resources or the ability of a minister to celebrate extempore.

3.6.2 More information could be provided on extempore or alternative orders for Communion and indeed on the relative freedom within Methodist Church concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It may be that FX leaders are not being appropriately mentored in this area of the church's life. If FX leaders are unaware of what might happen to be creative *and* Methodist, could appropriate guidance be offered by mentors, local presbyters, or DEE's? FX leaders, like other leaders, need to be adequately resourced.

3.7 Environment and Culture

3.7.1 Within Fresh Expressions there is an opinion that 'they' have never experienced this so 'they' don't know the culture or the full spectrum of spiritual and emotional influences at play. Reference was made to 'Gen. Y' where a non-worship experience includes singing; where there is no telling, only 'table-talk' and exploring or listening to discussion; where everything is experiential.

3.7.2 What makes a hospitable, open, group of people seeking Jesus a 'church'? Further exploration of the impact of Fresh Expressions ecclesiology may need to wait until the JAMWPEEEC group (Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of Church) reports next year. But is there not a need to accept that church, even the latest expressions of church, needs to maintain something of the DNA of the inherited even if it is a rejection of the way that DNA has been expressed? The Church holds to being One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. As such, it inherently follows some traditions as social markers and boundaries on the community/social identity. How much can these be deconstructed without losing the sense of the group being 'church'?

3.8 Membership

3.8.1 The matter of membership arises during a discussion about Holy Communion since the other sacramental aspect of the church is that of Baptism. There is a sense in which being able to welcome a newly committed Christian into the church is about a welcome extended by the local context, a Baptism into the body of Christ expressed in that context and a reception by the fellowship found in that place. The idea of Baptism being offered by the person who brought them into the church was a positive thought that further challenges ideas of doing what 'the institution says'.

In the context of a Methodist understanding of membership, many of the new Christians gathering within Fresh Expressions would not have an understanding of Methodism and would not seek to become members because of its connection with an institutionalised form of church that they choose not to attend and with which they may not be able to relate.

3.8.2 There are issues here about social realities which go beyond Methodism – contemporary society does not easily respond to calls to become 'members', as the Faith and Order Working Party on Membership has outlined in its report to the Portsmouth Conference 2010. But there are also issues about accountability and rules for a community – how does the Church work within Charity Law or establish ways to protect the vulnerable through principles of safeguarding. Are those elements to be ignored as well? To some extent, membership is an acknowledgement of responsibility to one's own community and also to a wider community. Methodism's adherence to connexionalism would surely suggest that we need to do more to show the benefits of being part of the societies rather than focus on being part of an institution? What about Methodism as being a check against some abuses of leadership in FX and a promotion of inclusivism, collaborative ministry, lay leadership?

3.9 'Fresh' Ways of Being Church

3.9.1 Leaders of Fresh Expressions are always seeking to grow disciples and facilitate engagement with specific populations within the community in ways that fall outside of traditional orthodoxy. The innovative approach and dynamic style needs constant renewing and this is part of the 'mindset' of the leaders and the attitude of those who come into these churches. These forms of church are attractive to people who are unchurched (by definition) and who completely fail to understand the sacramental connections to a theology of ordination, as an explanation of why their church leader cannot break bread and share wine. These explanations fall outside of the 'raison d'être' of being church in their context. One leader felt that it was the institution that was asking for the group to begin to think about sharing communion rather than being an issue for the group itself. In a new Fresh Expression, those present simply don't know about communion and don't ask about it. Since old-style church is seen as irrelevant and alienating, sometimes the inclusion of anything that hints of a connection has the potential to be irritating. Conventional church 'is the sort of thing that people who like that sort of thing do.'

As for being Methodist and sharing communion what exactly do Fresh Expressions need to understand? It was stated that the journey to fully embrace Fresh Expressions was more difficult for the church to do [since Methodism is perceived as an institution] than for Fresh Expression to pay some respect to the institution. It feels as if the church 'is trying to contaminate us with the institution' by denying something that was offered by Jesus.

3.9.2 The Methodist Church cannot compel FX's to become 'Methodist'. Similarly, if FX's choose not to become part of Methodism, then the Church would, presumably, wish them well in their future development beyond Methodism. But engagement with Methodism means simply that – engagement. It means acknowledging that there is something within the Methodist ways of doing things that reflect the heart of the Christian gospel and is worth signing up to.

Financially, there may be some hard decisions to make – the giving of finance needs to be responsible and might be considered bad practice for an FX to continue to receive money from a sponsoring body whose ethos it no longer accepts or is willing to explore.

There are issues in the comments about power and control. It is possible to hear in the comments belligerent independence, of the inherited church contaminating the fresh expression with its views, of fresh expressions as self-contained, closed set-type communities rather than open communities exploring the wealth of Christian tradition and seeking to follow the example of Christ. It is important to note that the institution of the Lord's Supper in specific ways was central to the early Church and was not a creation of later institutionalism. So, the discussion of the inherited church pushing the Fresh Expression into their ways suggests a closer analysis of their ecclesiology and the ecclesiology of those who are leading the fresh expressions. Is there a possibility of some disaffected pioneers intentionally guiding their communities away from the Church traditions because of their own disaffection rather than because of missional teaching?

Section C

Report of the Membership Working Party of the Faith and Order Committee

Response to M55(2007)

1.1 The 2007 Conference received the following memorial;

*M55 Nature of Membership
The St Albans and Welwyn (34/13) Circuit Meeting (Present: 38. Vote: 34 for, 0 against), in the light of recent sociological change and the range of understandings of missiology, entry into the church and the nature of church membership, invites Conference to assess whether the concept of membership best expresses the relationship individuals hold with the church catholic, the Methodist Connexion and local churches.*

and adopted the reply;

The Conference notes that the issue of membership has been the subject of reports on several occasions. The most substantial recent report Discipleship and Church Membership was in 2002 (Agenda 2002, pp. 609–622). However, changes of the sort mentioned in the memorial continue apace and developments such as Fresh Expressions of Church also raise questions about our understandings of membership and belonging. The Conference refers the Memorial to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration and to report back to the Conference no later than 2009.

1.2 The Faith and Order Committee appointed a Working Party charged with attending to the issues raised in both the Memorial and the reply. The working party recognised that, based on a number of existing Conference reports relating to Christian initiation, discipleship and ecclesiology, it would be possible to answer the question posed by the Memorial simply by drawing on earlier material. However, the reply correctly identifies some of the significant developments which have implications for our understanding of Membership.

1.3 These considerations appeared to point to a question which should perhaps be asked of members of the Methodist Church more widely, that is 'What does your Membership mean to you?'

1.4 In order to attempt to capture as wide an understanding of membership as possible the Working Party undertook a wider consultation on how Methodists view and experience Membership. To enable this to take place the Conference of 2009 gave permission for the Committee to delay its report until 2010. Through a number of focus groups the working

party sought to gain an understanding from a range of backgrounds and expressions of church life. Nine groups were consulted;

- A church with a Sunday congregation of over 150
- A Fresh Expression
- A church with a Sunday congregation of 40–60
- A small rural church
- A young people's group
- A Local Ecumenical Partnership
- A Black majority city church
- The housebound
- Superintendents

1.5 The responses from these groups offered useful insights on the understating of membership and placed great stress on the more general theme of discipleship than might have been expected. As the Working Party met to consider the responses from these groups it became clear that the Connexional Team was about to undertake a more concentrated and detailed piece of work on the theme of discipleship. That the focus groups had placed a stress on discipleship at a time when the development of this theme was not widely known is itself worthy of note. Ordinarily, and quite apart from the emerging theme of the Connexional Team, this report might then have turned to the question of discipleship in relation to Methodist understandings of membership. However in light of the priority and focus to be given to the theme of discipleship it would not now be appropriate to follow this course, at least not without close collaboration with those charged with developing the theme of discipleship. It could be argued that what is now required is a more integrated piece of work which picks up the themes of Memorial 55; the priority being given to discipleship by the Connexional Team; emerging trends in various Fresh Expressions; and the work of the working party considering the wider ecclesiological dimensions of Fresh Expressions.

1.6 As such, the Committee offers the following brief reflections on membership as a response to the memorial. In doing so the Committee signals that this piece of work should be seen in light of the emerging priority of discipleship. So, with some reluctance, the Committee has decided at this stage to make only a brief comment on the memorial and considers that as part of existing work on discipleship and emerging trends in Fresh Expressions work will need to be undertaken to understand what shape any future articulation of Membership may take. The committee would willingly contribute to such an exercise and would want to indicate at an early stage that any such consideration of membership needs to be set in the wider context of the Methodist tradition. The Committee will offer Conference the opportunity of affirming the need for this subject to be taken up elsewhere in the Connexional Team.

2. Historical overview and understanding.

2.1 Any consideration of Membership in contemporary Methodism needs to pay attention to the historical development of membership within the early societies that were in connexion with Mr Wesley. The clearest description of this in the official statements of the Conference is to be found in Section 4 of *Called to Love and Praise*, the Methodist Conference's 1999 Statement on its ecclesiology. Section 4.4 of *Called to Love and Praise* pays particular attention to the relationship of the individual to the Church Community in Methodism. Having outlined the way in which oversight of members developed, the report acknowledges that the practices surrounding the removal of people from membership are not easily understood. The statement presents it thus:

4.4.10 Sometimes members do not take up fully the privileges and responsibilities of membership. Some are able to do so only as far as their health or circumstances allow, (although they may still minister in various ways, not least by their prayers). In such cases the strong sense of mutual belonging should mean that the local church community

maintains contact and offers pastoral care. Others may begin to attend a church of another tradition, and their membership may be transferred to their new denomination. Others will simply lapse. They may not have ceased to believe, but for some reason they have stopped attending their local Methodist church. There may be good reason for this, but even if that appears not to be so, local pastoral care needs to be properly informed, understanding and sympathetic. After visiting by their class leader and minister, 'the name of any such person who by such prolonged absence severs himself or herself from Christian fellowship shall be removed from the class book by the Pastoral Committee and he or she shall thereupon cease to be a member of the Methodist Church' (Clause 10, *Deed of Union*). In this way the Church recognizes that these members no longer stand where they once did. The community roll, however, provides a way for the local church to remain in contact: 'the name of a person who has ceased to be a member ... shall be retained on the community roll unless he or she requests that this shall not be so.' (S.O. 054). The removal of their names from the list of church members is a way of stating that membership, by definition, involves commitment (however faltering or imperfect); what it cannot do is to determine whether such people continue to be part of the body of Christ, or to question the validity of their baptism, which, by its very nature, cannot be repeated. In such a way Methodist discipline indicates that Church membership calls for our continuing obedience, and that the Church must take proper care of its people, and keep count of its resources if it is to worship, witness and work effectively.

4.4.11 This procedure has caused much heart-searching and heartache. The Pastoral Committee's motive for removing someone's name from the membership roll may not in practice always be purely pastoral, as it should be. They may be oppressed by financial considerations, aware that their local church's contribution to Circuit finances may be related to its quoted membership total (although churches are increasingly finding better and fairer ways of assessing financial contributions than solely by reference to membership figures). But despite doubts and occasional misuse of the practice of removing the names of lapsed members from the membership roll, this discipline is an important testimony to the belief that a non-practising Christian is a contradiction in terms.

4.4.12 In recent years, the ecumenical movement, a more mobile population, and a readiness to worship in the local church, even when that church is not of one's own denomination, have all helped to make Christians more familiar with the practice of traditions other than their own. Christians who come to Methodism from other churches often find the close care of its members, (as described in 4.4.8–9), both attractive and questionable. It is attractive because it can be pastorally very effective when, for example, people move home or students leave home for college. But it is more questionable when it leads Methodists to exaggerate the importance of membership figures, especially in estimating a church's strength. The practice of recording members as having 'ceased to meet' can also be easily misunderstood, particularly by those who do not fully understand Methodism's societal origin and background, or who find it hard to appreciate the value of it for our life together in the Church today.

4.4.13 Amongst Methodists at large an important debate continues. Some hold that the evolution from a society to a denomination was and is both desirable and inevitable, since now a 'societal' approach to Christianity dangerously over-simplifies what being a Christian is, especially in areas of social responsibility. Others believe that the New Testament churches were 'societies', and that an emphasis on discipline and accountability is a healthy corrective to nominal Christianity. What can hardly be denied is that the Methodist movement of the eighteenth century enabled the Methodist Church to discover that a denomination must have a web of primary groups – a society of friends – at its heart, and that to allow that to dissipate would be a dangerous mistake, and an immeasurable loss to the Church as a whole.

2.2 It could then be argued that the removal from membership does not, in its present form,

make as clear as it might that this is not an end to a person's relationship to the church through confirmation, but that it is a distinctive feature of the nature of Methodism and the sense of belonging to a society in connexion with other societies. Reports to the Conference in 1999 and 2002 on Methodist Membership and Christian Discipleship touched on this matter. In 1999 the Conference 'indicated its unwillingness to separate Methodist membership from the rite of confirmation'. The nature of Methodism is such that membership is fundamental to the way in which belonging is expressed. What has to be remembered is that for the early Methodist Societies questions of Baptism and Confirmation were not generally of concern, it is only as Methodism became more established as a church that such matters began to take on a new dimension. As expressions of ecclesial life develop still further it will be important to find ways of expressing the essence of belonging in Methodism. At present Membership offers a structured way in which to nurture, encourage and care for individuals whilst making clear that this is a corporate responsibility of the whole community of faith. No one member of the Local Church can claim *not* to have some responsibility in this.

2.3 Based on the statement, *Called to Love and Praise*, the current theological definitions provide for an affirmative answer to whether the concept of membership best expresses the relationship individuals hold with the church catholic, the Methodist Connexion and Local Churches. Whether the current practice does this is of course another matter. In that regard some attention must be given to the ongoing nature of nurturing the commitment inherent to membership.

3. Ongoing Catechetical Process

3.1 So far as the practices of the first 'people called Methodist' were concerned, people were admitted as members of the Methodist societies, not because of a statement of faith or belief, but because they desired to be saved from the wrath to come, and to that end were prepared to accept the discipline of the rules of the society to work out what salvation and living a Christian life might entail. These societies were no other than 'a company of men, having the form and seeking the power, of godliness; united, in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.'¹ The groups covenanted together to help each other show evidence in their daily lives of their desire for salvation through keeping a rule of life. This rule of life transcended the personal formation of its practitioners. The dynamic of the rule was the 'appropriation and application of those disciplines which equip and empower the believer to be a faithful disciple in the world.' The all embracing nature of the rules is evidenced in the detail of practical application which was contained within the rules as such rules were recast to meet the needs those seeking to make commitments and live faithfully as disciples of Christ. Working out the requirements of the rules of life in the first Methodist societies enshrined a deep principle that the quest for holiness was not solitary, but rather drew people together in a discipleship which embraced devotion, discipline, social action and conversation.²

3.2 That this took place in a class or band is a reminder of the corporate nature of discipleship. That people could be and were removed from the society, and still can be removed from the local church, is a reminder that there is a requirement to attend to one's salvation. Being received into membership is not the end of the process, it offers an opportunity to grow and develop and in that regard it is beholden upon the local church to ensure that there are meaningful opportunities for nurture and education. As greater attention is given to the theme of nurturing discipleship it will be important that attention is given to the

¹ The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 1 The Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists p 73.

² *Called to Love and Praise* 1999 Report to Conference 4.2.14.

celebration of membership in that it provides a rigorous and meaningful context in which to celebrate life as an Easter people. As expressed within Methodism this underlines the dual responsibility of disciples to both celebrate the faith and be accountable in the exercising of worship and service.

3.3 The requirement to be a member of and the opportunity to participate in a class, as set out in Standing Orders might, if developed and celebrated, provide for the nurture and growth in faith of members. In our post Christian context, we perhaps also have something to learn from the process of initiation into the faith community in the pre-Christendom context. In this context as in our own, initiation into the Christian community required an education into the Christian story, and practices of the believing community, in a society in which these were largely unknown. This was a process intimately owned by the early Church. It was highly risky being a Christian, and the Christian community had to take care over who it initiated because of the potential threat to the lives of those in the community. The Church needs to recapture the sense of priority in paying attention to the process of initiation, finding ways of connecting it to the ongoing life of the Christian community, and ensuring it is owned by the community. There is often a disconnection between the church community and parents who bring their children for baptism, or those who drift back into the church after many years, who begin to have a sense of belonging, but because they have missed out on much Christian education, lack clarity on what they believe and its implications for their way of life.

3.4 An ongoing process of catechesis needs to nurture a discipleship which is an initiation into a faith community, and also takes seriously ongoing needs for sustaining and growth in holiness. That was true of early Methodism and remains true today. When that is addressed, there is more likelihood that the rights and responsibilities of membership will be more clearly understood.

4. Putting the Heart Back Into Membership

4.1 For many years there has been a growing sense that 'we should not seek to make membership an easier option, but rather a more worthwhile and attractive one, and in particular to recreate strong links between being a member and continuing in discipleship with Christ.'³ The Methodist Church has a strong imperative to find ways to make new disciples, and to continue to sustain all disciples in a dynamic practical discipleship which urges us onto 'perfection' while giving us daily foretaste of that perfect love. The renewed emphasis on discipleship will go some way to help achieve this, but that same focus will itself need to take seriously the fact that Membership has a unique place in Methodism and is one of the characteristics defining features of Methodist ecclesiology and order. Whilst it is the case that membership is undoubtedly counter cultural that does not mean that it is wrong or should easily be abandoned as belonging to the past. It offers as it has always offered, the possibilities of a structured and supportive environment in which disciples seek to be more Christ like. If of course that requires people to become more vile for the sake of the gospel, then the understanding of the counter cultural demands of belonging have not only been understood, but have been articulated and expressed in such a way to be faithful to both our Methodist heritage and the way in which the people called Methodists articulate their understanding of response to the call of God.

4.2 Far from being a purely, or indeed merely, administrative nicety membership is at the heart of the structure of Methodism in a way that is not the case in other denominations. Whilst some independent churches have a concept of membership their very independence or congregational polity means that the membership is a clear articulation of the more local. In Methodism the class meeting is part of the local society which itself is part of a wider fellowship in connexion with the Conference. As such there is an immediate sense of belonging to a wider church that itself claims and cherishes its place within the wider holy catholic and apostolic church.

- 4.3 Just as our Standing Orders articulate theological concepts so they help offer a clear understanding of the nature of Membership and all that it implies. The rights and the responsibilities of membership are articulated in a number of ways. The most obvious is the requirements of members to avail themselves of the sacraments as set out in clause 9 of the Deed of Union. Additionally there are rights to participate in the oversight and governance bodies at all levels of the life of the Methodist Church. Membership is therefore fundamental to the structures of the Church in that Membership is what permits, and enables wide participation. This is not to say that membership is offered without question, and the requirements of preparation for Membership and the process by which admission takes place are clearly articulated in our Standing Orders. As has been indicated above, this is not the totality of the process. The responsibility for belonging to a class and the requirement that there is particular oversight of that class indicates the expectation upon paying continued attention to spiritual development. That the Methodist Church has a Complaints and Discipline process which applies to both lay and ordained is a further indication of the seriousness with which membership must be taken and is a reminder that membership brings with it certain responsibilities concerning behaviour and conduct in all aspects of life.
- 4.4 The place of Membership has gained particular prominence as some Local Churches, Circuits, and indeed the Conference as a whole, have been required to register as charities. The polity of the Methodist Church requires membership for those attending a church to act in certain trustee roles for both the purposes of both our own legislation and also for that of the *Charities Act*. Such a requirement places a responsibility upon members as well as giving to members the rights of participating in the oversight of particular entities. The democratic nature of Methodism, in which corporate oversight is present at every level of church life, (and shared by Lay and Ordained) is a positive expression of belonging that deserves celebration and careful nurturing.
- 4.5 The memorial asked for a response to whether 'the concept of membership best expresses the relationship individuals hold with church Catholic, the Methodist Connexion and local churches?' This aspect of the memorial provides for two avenues of continued reflection as the theme of discipleship is further refined and promoted, those are: (a) the relational nature of membership within contemporary society, and (b) the nature and breadth of the Christian affiliation expressed within an understanding of membership. There are strong echoes of the memorial to Conference in 1991 that generated *Called to Love and Praise* when advice was sought about 'the contemporary understanding of the term "membership" and the searching questions posed by non-Methodist Christians participating in our acts of worship' (*Called to Love and Praise*, para. 1.3.3). That *Called to Love and Praise* in 1999 and then again the Methodist Worship Book in 1999 expressed the mind of the church with regard to the centrality of Membership within the Methodist experience has led the committee to conclude that the notion of membership is not only faithful to Methodism, but is a valuable expression of the individual's relationship with the Church catholic. All of this requires promotion and celebration for the understanding of membership as it is presently articulated not only reflects the development of discipleship in Methodism, but also articulates the way in which the people called Methodists live and crucially offer a way of living in the household of God to wider society. Far from being about an individualistic expression of belonging, it is at one and the same time the most local expression of being in connexion with a wider body, and a clear and unambiguous expression of the role of the local community in the church catholic. If the core elements of membership are not clearly understood, then there is much to be done by way of promotion and education, for by that a vital expression Methodism will be celebrated and expressed.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 28/4. The Conference adopted Section C of the Report as its reply to M 55(2007).
- 28/5. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to ensure that this work is taken up further by the relevant members of the Connexional Team in association with the development of the discipleship theme in consultation with Faith and Order Committee and the Fresh Ways Working Group.