

57. Memorials to the Conference

issues, and the Justice-seeking Church report adopted by the Conference in 2023 sets out a range of ways in which Methodists are already engaged in pursuing justice for refugees, and could develop that engagement further. The Conference therefore makes clear that it does not believe that the policy work of the Church around justice for refugees should be limited to advocating for the recommendations of the Commission on the Integration of Refugees.

The Conference therefore also adds its endorsement to the 'Fair Begins Here' campaign from the Together with Refugees coalition (www.togetherwithrefugees.org.uk), of which the Methodist Church has been a member since its launch in 2021. This is calling for a fair new plan for refugees that:

- Ensures protection for people fleeing war and persecution by upholding the UK's commitment under international law to the right to claim asylum and by scrapping the Rwanda scheme.
- Provides a proper strategy for welcoming and integrating refugees by ensuring fair, rapid decisions on their application for asylum, and the chance to rebuild their lives through settling in a community, being allowed to work and the chance to learn English.
- Forges stronger global cooperation to tackle the root causes that force people to flee their homes and provides positive solutions when they do, including through safe routes to refugee protection.

In the context of the current General Election campaign, the Conference also points to the election briefing from the Joint Public Issues Team on asylum and refugee issues, which summarises key concerns and suggests questions which could be raised with parliamentary candidates.

The Conference accepts the memorial.

M12 Mission Partner Programme

The Bolton and Rochdale District Synod (Present: 47; Voting: 44 for, 0 against) requests the Conference to direct the Global Relationships Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee to provide a full explanation of the rationale by which the Ordained Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be continued and the Lay Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be closed.

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This should include amongst other relevant factors and documents:

1. The mission theology which was used to make this distinction;
2. A copy of the advisory mission-theological paper, which was submitted to the committee to help make this decision;
3. An identification of the 'place' in the financial decision making process where the action was taken to set aside reserves for the continuation of the Ordained Mission Partner Programme but not to set aside reserves for the continuance of the Lay Mission Partner Programme;
4. Whether that decision making 'place' was a committee, an executive individual or some other body;
5. The financial projections of reserves and future programme costs, which was used for the decision;
6. Any other relevant material.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Bolton and Rochdale District Synod for this memorial and gives thanks that God has not stopped calling people, both lay and ordained, to mission and ministry in every corner of the world. However recognising the in depth theological, structural, and participative work already undertaken by the Global Relationships Committee (GRC) and the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), the Mission Committee, the Council and the debate at last year's Conference in this area, it declines the memorial.

The GRC had to wrestle with what a much-reduced World Mission Fund (WMF) should be used for in future. It did so in the context of unpacking the nature of global partnership in the Gospel. The main uses of the WMF at the time were grants to partner churches covering a Nationals-in-Mission programme, scholarships for leadership training, annual support to poorer churches, and grants given to partner churches in response to emergencies, and to the sending of Mission Partners. The Mission Partner Programme was both ordained and lay. All this spending could no longer all be afforded from the reduced level of income. The budget for all work has needed to be cut. This has resulted in reducing what we will give our Partners in grants by around 90%, and a cut to the Mission Partner budget of at least 50%.

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The missional thinking behind cutting less of the Mission partner budget than the grants budget was set out in a confidential paper presented to the Global Relationships Committee in December 2022 and includes the following: *'...Mission Partners generate interest in the global Church and our Partners. This programme is a sign of solidarity, incarnational mission, and a commitment to learn from and be accountable to our Partners...Many who return having served as Mission Partners do so with enhanced skills and new perspectives that are of service in our context.'*

The new financial realities mean that MCB can now only afford to send less than half of its current number of Mission Partners.

The decision then had to be made on how most effectively to use the reduced Mission Partner portion of the budget. After much prayerful consideration and having reflected theologically and examined a range of option, the Global Relationships Committee decided with great sadness to recommend ending the employment of lay Mission Partners. It did this in consultation with the Methodist Church in Ireland with who our overseas work is undertaken in partnership.

The thought, reflection and consideration given were extensive. Just two points are made here;

First, whilst ordained personnel from overseas can enter the MCB via the Ministers of other Churches and Conferences (MOCC) programme, lay folks cannot. Second, whilst ordained Mission Partners and employed Mission Partners receive the same stipends and benefits, there have been costs and risks incurred on the WMF for employees that, in a future programme for only ordained Mission Partners, would no longer be applicable. These costs and risks have been uncertain and large, creating an unsustainably high risk in budget-management.

The Conference recognises and applauds the GRC in its commitment to explore vocational and missional opportunities for all those in the life of the MCB in partnership with its overseas partner churches. The Conference gives thanks for all those who continue to work to increase the giving into the WMF, paying especial tribute to the work of Methodist Women in Britain.

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M13 Mission Partners

The Yorkshire North and East District Synod (Present: 99 voting: in favour 94, against 3) requests the Methodist Conference to direct the Global Relationships Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee to provide a full explanation of the rationale by which the Ordained Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be continued and the Lay Mission Partner Programme was chosen to be closed and a report on the exploration of pathways and partnerships by which Methodist lay people may exercise this calling into the future.

This should include amongst other relevant factors and documents:

1. The mission theology which was used to make this distinction;
2. A copy of the advisory mission-theological paper, which was submitted to the committee to help make this decision;
3. An identification of the 'place' in the financial decision making process where the action was taken to set aside reserves for the continuation of the Ordained Mission Partner Programme but not to set aside reserves for the continuance of the Lay Mission Partner Programme;
4. Whether that decision making 'place' was a committee, an executive individual or some other body;
5. The financial projections of reserves and future programme costs, which was used for the decision;
6. Any other relevant material.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yorkshire North and East District Synod for the memorial and adopts the same reply as M12.

M14 Connexional Financial Support

The Peterborough Circuit Meeting (23/21) (present: 27 voting: in favour 24, against 0) calls on the Conference to commission a review of how the Connexional Principle (mutual support, and the stronger enabling the weak) is being upheld across our Church, particularly in relation to finance, and how we help poorer Circuits and Local Churches through periods of transition towards growth.