

7. *What is a District Chair?*

7. What is a District Chair?

WHAT IS A DISTRICT CHAIR?

1. The starting points for this report 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 2004²)
 - the report *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* adopted by the Conference in 2005³
 - the material concerning Chairs of District in the *Deed of Union* and *Standing Orders*⁴
 - the report *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* adopted by the Conference in 1999⁵
2. This report is one of several related pieces of work which seek to outline the general nature of various ministerial roles in the Methodist Church. Included in that is the part that they each play in exercising oversight in the Church. This report therefore also relates to some other pieces of work which are seeking to address the ways in which oversight is shared between corporate bodies, lay-office holders and those exercising particular ministerial roles in Methodism.⁶

1 Methodist Conference 2002 Agenda pp. 446-454 and 455-467 respectively, and (with textual corrections adopted by the Conference) in Over to You 2002 Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough 2002 pp. 74-82 and 83-96.

2 Methodist Conference 2004 Agenda pp. 12-30. The report is also reprinted (with textual corrections adopted by the Conference) in Over to You 2004 MPH, Peterborough 2004 pp. 16-32.

3 Methodist Conference 2005 Agenda pp. 157-174. The report is available (with textual corrections adopted by the Conference) on www.methodist.org.uk.

4 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.

5 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.

6 These other pieces of work include:

- The report *The Nature of Oversight* (2005 Conference Agenda pp. 60-123, also available with textual corrections agreed by the Conference on www.methodist.org.uk.) The report was commended for study in the development of good practice in the Church, on the assurance that a further report would be brought to the Conference of 2007 upon the responses received.
- The report *What Sort of Bishops?: Models of Episcopacy and British Methodism* (2005 Conference Agenda pp. 552-583, also available with textual corrections agreed by the Conference on www.methodist.org.uk.) The report was commended for study and discussion, and a further report will be brought to the Conference of 2007 to enable a decision to be made about whether to proceed to embrace the historic episcopate.
- *The Review of the Methodist Council*, the recommendations of which were adopted by the 2005 Conference, and *The Review of the Methodist Conference*, an interim report of which was

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3. As with *What is a Presbyter?*, *What is a Deacon?* and *What is a Circuit Superintendent?*, this report seeks to discern the intention underlying the role of District Chairs as it has variously been expressed through Methodist history and in current practice. In so doing, it looks to describe a model of best practice which can be reflected upon and re-embodied in a variety of situations in the future.⁷ It therefore seeks to help shape future practice by describing what is currently good practice. As such, its intention is to encourage, stimulate and assist District Chairs, Districts and the wider connexion.

District Chairs, Circuit Superintendents and presbyters: introduction and historical background⁸

4. First and foremost, District Chairs 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 the role of presbyters⁹, 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 District Chairs, like other presbyters, are potentially a means of grace in that they are part of God's gift to the Church and the world.
5. At the same time there has been a long tradition of "leading" presbyters (often identified by their seniority in terms of years of service) taking on particular types of appointment in the connexion, such as being Circuit Superintendents and District Chairs.¹⁰ The appointment of District Chairs goes back to those years immediately following the death of John Wesley when Methodism was developing its own structures and ecclesiastical organisation. The companion report *What is a Circuit Superintendent?*¹¹, outlines how Methodism began as both a holiness movement and a mission movement within the Church of England, and developed forms of leadership which were appropriate to both. Some of these leaders were what we would now recognise as lay officers, whilst others were Preachers (whom Wesley describes as 'extraordinary messengers' calling people to discern and respond to the dynamics of the Kingdom of God as it continually broke out in new ways¹²). Those Preachers who were itinerant (i.e. not locally based, but

received by the 2005 Conference with a further report to be brought to the 2006 Conference. (The text of the reports can be found in the 2005 Conference Agenda pp. 124-145 and 146-156 respectively, and are also available with textual corrections agreed by the Conference on www.methodist.org.uk).

- 7 It can therefore be used to help improve the setting up of appointments for District Chairs in districts, and the "recruitment" or "selection" of potential District Chairs. It can also be used to set outcomes for the training of District Chairs.
- 8 More extended versions of the material in this section can be found in *What is a Circuit Superintendent?*, particularly paras. 4-13; and *The Nature of Oversight*, particularly para. 2.23-4 and 3.13.
- 9 See further paras. 13-14 below.
- 10 See further para. 52 below.
- 11 See in particular paras. 4-13.
- 12 See further *What is a Presbyter?* para 1 note 4 and the extended note after para 4.9 of *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*.

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available from time to time to make a ‘circuit’ round a particular part of the country to preach and to visit and oversee the Methodist movement) and recognised as “Mr. Wesley’s Assistants” gradually evolved into what we now know as the ordained ministers (presbyters) of the Methodist Church, and the leading one sent to each circuit began to be known as the “Superintendent”.¹³ Moreover, as separation gradually took place from the Church of England, the societies which made up the Methodist movement began to take on some aspects of churches. The ‘extraordinary messengers’ therefore began 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 what became the ordained ministers (presbyters) of a Church and later, as fragmentation occurred, of a number of Churches or denominations.

6. Superintendents had an important role of leadership amongst the ordained ministers (presbyters) of the Church because the Circuit was the primary unit for organising worship and mission and the nurturing of discipleship in the connexion. Yet after Wesley’s death an additional role was also developed. Although it was possible for a corporate body, the Conference, to fulfil some of the functions of oversight which Wesley had exercised, a means had to be identified for the fulfilling of others, such as dealing with problems and disputes or offering support and advice to the Circuits between meetings of the Conference. The 1791 Conference decided that since there was to be no single successor to Mr. Wesley this could best be achieved by dividing “the three kingdoms” into 27 Districts “for the preservation of our whole economy as the Revd. Mr. Wesley left it”¹⁴. However, the Districts were to have few functions of their own, and it was the role of the Chairman which was to be important. At the 1792 Conference the preachers appointed to serve in the Circuits which now made up each District were asked to choose a Chairman¹⁵ from among their number. Those elected were ministers considered to be “senior figures” in the Connexion. During the 1790’s it gradually became established that the Chairmen should deal with any cases of discipline affecting the preachers in each District which needed to be addressed before the ensuing Conference; and that the Chairmen were to act as arbitrators in any dispute involving preachers, stewards and societies. From 1797 the Chairmen were listed on the stations (although the role of Chairman was not separated from that of a circuit minister and, like Superintendents, they continued to be appointed to Circuits on the stations). From 1798 the Districts were named after the chief town or city in that locality.
7. This development amongst what we would now call the ordained ministers (presbyters) of a particular role for a District Chairman alongside that of a Circuit Superintendent paralleled developments which had already occurred amongst Methodists in America.¹⁶ In both British and American Methodism two complementary expressions of what we might term “superintendency”

13 The term “Superintendent of the Circuit” became a formal title in the Minutes of the 1796 Conference.

14 *Minutes* of the 1791 Conference.

15 The term has survived until recently, when “Chairman” has been replaced with that of “Chair”.

16 See further *What is a Circuit Superintendent?*

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have emerged which differ from one another only in the areas of jurisdiction in which the superintendents' oversight is exercised and the ways in which those particular contexts make them develop their presbyteral ministry. For historical reasons, however, the two complementary roles emerged in slightly different ways in America and Britain. In America, the development was from General Superintendents (later Bishops)¹⁷ exercising oversight over wide areas of the whole connexion to District Superintendents (originally known as "presiding Elders") exercising oversight over particular Districts that made up those wide areas.¹⁸ In Britain the development was from Circuit Superintendents who each exercised oversight in a particular Circuit to District Chairs who each exercised oversight on behalf of the Conference over a number of Circuits grouped together in a District as a sub-division of the whole connexion.

8. In Britain the process of evolution begun after Wesley's death in 1791 continued in the various Methodist traditions and then in the Methodist Church which united around the Deed of Union in 1932. So far as the role of District Chair was concerned, from 1810 the Wesleyan Chairmen presided over the District examination of those proposed for the itinerancy. From 1815 the Chairmen presided over the examination of preachers for reception into Full Connexion. From 1842 they had to visit single minister stations twice a year. From 1844 they could make an official visit to any Circuit 'by invitation or consultation' with the Superintendent. From 1892 District Meetings became Synods. In the other traditions, the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians had District Meetings from the 1820s and ordinations in the Primitive Methodist Church took place at District Meetings.
9. The process of evolution in the role of District Chair continued after Methodist union in 1932. Major reviews of the role were undertaken in the 1950's as the Church sought to respond to the changes in both Church and society in the aftermath of the Second World War. Reports to the Conferences of 1955 and 1956 reviewed recent history and argued that

17 Wesley was reacting to what he considered to be the failure of the Church of England to make provision for the people of North America in the aftermath of the War of Independence, and so was more consciously seeking to establish a Church than a movement when he took steps to ensure that Coke and Asbury were ordained and set apart as "Joint Superintendents" charged with ordering the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the godly organisation of the people. In this we can clearly see the three characteristics of presbyteral ministry as identified in the 2002 report *What is a Presbyter?* (ministry of the word, ministry of sacrament, ministry of pastoral responsibility) being exercised in an episcopal way. Yet even though the General Superintendents who succeeded Coke and Asbury came to be called "Bishops", they were not "Bishops in the historic episcopate" (see further *Episkopé and Episcopacy* 2000 Conference Agenda paras 54-57), and the 'episcopal' nature of the ministry of the Bishops was seen as being 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.

18 As the work developed in North America, more Superintendents were required because of the vast distances to be covered. 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. There were Circuits in each District, but the relatively small number of ordained ministers (originally known as "circuit riders") allied to the vast distances meant that many of the structures for oversight which in Britain were located in Circuits were provided in districts in America; and those provided in Districts in Britain were provided in the wider areas made up of several Districts in America.

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“In spite of the fact that we have in our Connexional system a God-given instrument of co-ordination and united effort, there was too little continuity of policy or of leadership, and this at a time when the population of the country was on the move and it was obvious that the distribution of our resources was hopelessly out of keeping with the shape of society, as it now is and as it will be when the present shift of the population is complete in about ten years’ time”¹⁹.

As one consequence of this it was therefore judged that

“The days are now passed when the responsibilities of a District Chairman can be limited to presiding over the District Synod and dealing with matters of discipline and stationing. Without any decision being made at any particular time, it has gradually been assumed that the Chairman of the District will be the officer responsible for the general policy of advance within the borders of his District..... In the opinion of the Committee, the needs of the future are such that it is essential that throughout the country there should be officers exercising responsibility of this kind who are in a position to survey each District as a whole, and to devote a great deal of time, where necessary, to the special area and local problems and opportunities thrust upon the Church by the shifting of population and other changes in the social scene.”²⁰

It is noteworthy that this emphasis on “advance” and “mission” in the role of District Chairman was reflected in the fact that the title of both reports referred to “District Missionaries”.

“It was understood that these leaders, in their capacity as District Missionaries, would be fully committed to encouraging evangelism in all Circuits where it is being undertaken and initiating it where it is not.”²¹

But this was not to be the only emphasis of their ministry:

“They should also exercise a pastoral ministry among the ministers of their own Districts, especially those in lonely and difficult stations”²².

Furthermore those making the report came to the conclusion that

“... to meet the present urgent situation Methodism needed a body of men who had full knowledge of what was happening in the Circuits and Districts, who could frequently confer and who, when policy was formulated, could see that it was carried through over a period of time by sustained effort..... Such men would have to speak *for* the Districts and Circuits at a Connexional level and

19 *District Missionaries and General Policy* 1956 Conference Agenda.

20 *District Missionaries and General Policy* 1955 Conference Agenda. (The exclusively male references reflect the historical reality in which only men could be ordained as ministers and so be appointed to the role).

21 1956 report.

22 1956 report.

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“speak *to* the Districts and Circuits on behalf of the Church as a whole”²³.

These urgent needs and the pressures on circuit ministers led to the judgement that

“... it is no longer possible for a minister with Circuit responsibilities to discharge effectively those duties which in these days devolve upon the Chairman of a District”²⁴, and therefore that “this called for men free from heavy Circuit responsibilities who could exercise a ministry of leadership in the Church”²⁵.

This led to a decision that from 1957-8 the role of Chair of District would become a specific (and normally full-time) appointment in its own right, and that those who exercised it would therefore generally be “separated” from circuit appointments on the stations. However, in order to lessen the cost of providing additional stipends for “separated” Chairs, it was also decided to reduce the number of mainland districts from the previous forty:

“in the light of the experience we have in certain Districts at present, the Committee has come to the conclusion that approximately 30,000 members is the most workable size for a District with a separated Chairman, and suggests that the division of the Connexion into about twenty-eight Districts (not including the island districts) would be the best solution”²⁶.

10. From 2006 there will be thirty-two Districts. Twenty-seven of these will each have a single “separated” full-time Chair. The large new London District will have three “separated” full-time Chairs (one Lead Chair and two Co-Chairs). Four Districts (the Channel Islands; the Isle of Man; Shetland; North Wales) will have “non-separated” Chairs who will exercise the role of Chair part-time and normally simultaneously fulfil another part-time role as a Superintendent or other presbyter.
11. In recent years the role of the District Chair has continued to evolve.
 - (a) Ecumenical commitments, secular organisations and wider society have all provided contexts in which the Chair is increasingly required to function as the representative of the Methodist Church in a particular region.
 - (b) Connexional issues have increasingly meant that Chairs collectively and individually have had tasks to perform beyond their work in their Districts. For example, all the Chairs are members of the Connexional Leadership Team (together with the General Secretary/Secretary of Conference and the Co-ordinating Secretaries; the past, present and designated President and Vice-President; the Warden of the Diaconal Order; and the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee) which meets to confer, articulate vision and thereby offer leadership to the

23 1956 report.

24 1955 report.

25 1956 report.

26 1955 report.

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Church, and which from September 2006 will offer a report on their conferring to the Methodist Council.²⁷ They have also belonged to a Chairs' Meeting, in which they have dealt with matters of common concern and which, because of the particular knowledge and experience which they bring to it, has been consulted from time to time by the Conference or the Methodist Council about matters of connexional policy and practice²⁸. Furthermore, together with a few connexional officers they constitute the Stationing Matching Group which plays a key role in the stationing matching processes²⁹.

- (c) Districts have been asked to undertake an increasing number of tasks on behalf of the Connexion that were previously carried out centrally: for example, the approval of applicants for Foundation Training; the allocation of monies from District Advance Funds; and the approval of minor property schemes. This has added to the work-load of the Chairs, since they have a responsibility for ensuring that the Districts carry out these tasks.
12. These developments have led to some reshaping of the role described in the 1955 and 1956 reports. This has been accompanied by the title of the office reverting from that of "District Missionary" to that of "Chair of District". The emphases in the 1955 and 1956 reports had been on being responsible for stationing, governance and administration; on being the ministers' minister; and on being a leader in mission and evangelism. How these aspects related to each other was not defined, but it was clear that the authors of the reports had discerned the priorities of the gospel for the Church in the changing society of the 1950's in a way that led to them placing the greatest weight on the post-holders being "District Missionaries", as was reflected in the title of the reports. That aspect of the role is still important, as will be noted below³⁰. However, although many of the emphases in the 1955 and 1956 reports have continued to be major themes, the expectations of wider society, the Connexion, Circuits and churches have all played a part in determining what is an evolving and developing ministry exercised by District Chairs, as has the experience and practice of individual Chairs. In the light of all that the particular role of District Chair has been shaped over time by decisions of Conference and Standing Orders, to which we turn below.
13. As is the case with Circuit Superintendents, Standing Orders require a District Chair to be a presbyter³¹. But, again like Circuit Superintendents, District Chairs are also primarily presbyters who are expressing that ministry through exercising a particular role in a particular context. At the root of

27 See further *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) para. 3.23, and also para. 32 in this report below.

28 See further *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) para. 3.23, and also para. 32 in this report below.

29 See further paras 31, 48 below.

30 See further paras. 18, 22, 23, 26, 48 and 55 (e)-(g).

31 In setting out the "Qualification" to be a Chair, SO 420 not only takes for granted that she or he must be a presbyter, but also requires that she or he must be "in the active work" i.e. not a Supernumerary:
A minister appointed to be the Chair of a District shall be a minister in the active work.

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everything they are, do and undergo, and not just in their exercise of that particular role, they are expected like all presbyters to be someone who is:³²

- *a person of faith, committed to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ*
- *possessed of a strong sense of God's calling to ministry, which is tested and affirmed by the Church*
- *of good character, committed to the pursuit of holiness and life-long learning, and faithful to apostolic doctrine*
- *obedient, accepting Connexional discipline, "our doctrines" and the principle of stationing*
- *firmly rooted within Methodist tradition, but draws on and is enriched by other ecclesiastical traditions*
- *a 'whole' person, interconnected with others through family, friendship or other close relationships*

14. As with other presbyters, the whole ministry of District Chairs is essentially a ministry of the word, of sacrament and of pastoral responsibility.³³ 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.³⁴ All presbyters represent and embody the oversight of the primary body in the Church, namely the

32 *What is a Presbyter?* (2002) para. 12

33 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 the role of District Chairs see below.

- 34 Some examples of the ways in which others can participate in the ministries exercised by all presbyters (including those appointed to be 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 others, and can undertake particular acts of pastoral work to embody that care.

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Conference, in a particular way, yet have to share that oversight and authority with deacons and with the proper officers and formal bodies of the place to which they are sent.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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 particular 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.

15. The above is as true for District Chairs as it is for all other presbyters. All presbyters exercise the same ministry, 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 Superintendent is the Circuit, which was dealt with in the companion report *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* adopted by the 2005 Conference. The context for a Chair is the District but also, as noted above, the wider connexion, and this is dealt with below.

Chairs, Districts and the wider Connexion

16. Historically, as we have seen, Circuits pre-date Districts. If the Conference is the primary unit for the oversight of worship and mission throughout the whole Connexion, and the Circuit is the primary unit for organising worship and mission and the nurturing of disciples locally, the District is best seen as a necessary and important but secondary unit enabling and servicing both the Conference and the Circuits.³⁷ Standing Order 400A (1)³⁸ defines the main

35 See further *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) 2.22 – 2.27.

36 See further *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) 2.22 – 2.24.

37 See further *The Nature of Oversight* (2005) paras. 3.13-3.21.

38 *SO 400A(1) The primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns. The District serves the Local Churches and Circuits and the Conference in the support, deployment and oversight of the various ministries of the Church, and in programmes of training. It has responsibility for the evaluation of applications by Local Churches and Circuits for approval of or consent to their proposals, when required, or for assistance from district or connexional bodies or funds. Wherever possible the work of the District is carried out ecumenically. The District is thus an expression, over a wider geographical area than the Circuit, of the connexional character of the Church.*

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purpose of the District as being the advancement of mission³⁹ in a region. Its major responsibilities are to act as the arms of the Connexion in helping people to develop local strategies, and to play a part on behalf of the Conference in such matters as ministerial selection, stationing, accountability and discipline. By analogy or extension it also now has parallel responsibilities for or roles in such matters as the connexional Complaints and Discipline procedures, and for the preliminary vetting of circuit applications for connexional funds.

17. To fulfil its purpose, the District 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*.⁴⁰ Oversight is a means of ensuring that a movement or

(2) *Since every member in the District is as such a member of the Methodist Missionary Society, the purposes of the District include the promotion of understanding of and support for the work of the Society to the end that every member may share actively in world mission.*

- 39 The term ‘mission’ is used here according to the broad definition of the term used in the ‘Our Calling’ process. So,

“The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.”

where that ‘mission’ has a threefold definition of service, caring and evangelism.

- 40 See further paragraphs 1.1 to 1.15 of the report *The Nature of Oversight* (2005). In them the basic terms of governance, management and leadership are defined generically as follows, although not every aspect of the definitions will necessarily apply in the exercise of these functions in a particular situation:

Governance is defined in 1.11 of that report 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.

Management is defined in 1.12 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.

Leadership is defined in 1.13 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.

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church remains true to its nature and purpose as it grows and develops and as its context changes. The British Conference is the supreme source of oversight under God for the whole Methodist connexion. The Conference in turn delegates and shares this oversight (but without ceasing to exercise it itself) by authorising people and groups to embody it in the rest of the Connexion. There are two main strands to this. On the one hand the Conference delegates particular responsibilities in particular situations to other formally constituted bodies and to specific office-holders. On the other it sends presbyters to those situations in order to exercise pastoral responsibility in them and, when they are appointed to Circuits, pastoral charge. Oversight only comes to its fullness in each place when these two strands are properly meshed together.⁴¹

18. In the context of a District, therefore, lay officers, deacons and formal bodies participate 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 each have their proper role in this. Collectively they exercise oversight together with the Chair and the other presbyters who are appointed to fulfil their pastoral responsibility in the Circuits that make up the District or in other appointments that are connected with them. The Chair has a particular role to play in enabling all parties to participate in this.
19. The District Synod is the principal body for exercising oversight over all the affairs of the District⁴², and the District's lay officers and deacons together with the Chair and other presbyters participate in it. The term 'oversight' is being used here in its broadest sense. Within Standing Orders and the other documents that make up the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* the adjective 'district' is used to distinguish matters which relate to all Circuits in a District or to no Circuit, from those which relate to particular Circuits. The former can include its own officers, committees, activities and projects, over which the Synod exercises oversight in terms of both management and governance. The latter refers to the particular affairs of each Circuit, which the Synod does not manage and over which it does not exercise much in the way of governance. Traditionally, as the primary units for organising worship and mission and the nurturing of disciples, Circuits have been directly accountable to the Conference, and Districts have had very little right or ability to initiate or direct things with regard to them except in

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

- 41 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* (2005).
- 42 *SO 412(1) the Synod is the policy-making court of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and the connexional Team on the one hand and the Circuits and Local Churches on the other. It shall have oversight of all district affairs. It shall formulate and promote policies, through its various officers and committees, to assist the mission of the Church, to give inspiration to the leaders in the Circuits and to ensure the interrelation of all aspects of the Church's life throughout the District. It is a forum in which issues of public concern relevant to the witness of the Church may be addressed. The Synod's business is the work of God in the District, expressed in worship, conversation, formal business, the communication of Conference matters to the Circuits and the submission of memorials to the Conference.*

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some matters where Standing Orders require Circuits to seek permission from Districts before doing something (for example if they wish to apply for grants). In recent years, however, the number of matters where the District makes decisions about or intervenes in the affairs of Circuits has begun to increase. Thus Districts have to “formulate and keep under review a development master-plan for the Methodist church buildings and circuit staffing of the District...”⁴³; “review the state of the circuit Advance Funds and their distribution through the District”, following which they may propose to (but not order!) the relevant Circuit Meeting schemes for the application elsewhere of capital money or income of any such fund⁴⁴; and may make grants out of the capital or income of the district Advance Fund (which may in turn receive monies from the Connexional Advance and Priority Fund) for the support of personnel serving in any of the Circuits (as well as the District) or property schemes or ecumenical work⁴⁵. Nevertheless, the predominant use of verbs such as “formulate and promote”, “assist”, “give inspiration”, “encourage” in Standing Orders 400A, 412(1) and 431 suggest that the main aspect of the oversight exercised by Districts is that of leadership.⁴⁶

20. Beyond the District Synod Districts have traditionally not been heavily structured entities. As we noted above,⁴⁷ when they were first created Districts were to have few functions of their own, and it was the role of the Chairman which proved to be more important. It is argued by some that it is still the case that in many ways the role of the Chair is more important than the structures of the District in enabling the District to fulfil its purposes.
21. Standing Order 424 thus sets out the basic responsibilities of Chairs as follows
 - (1) *The prime duty of a Chair is to further the work of God in the District. To this end he or she will use all the gifts and graces he or she has received, being especially diligent to be a pastor to the ministers and probationers and to lead the ministry and laity of the District in the work of preaching and worship, evangelism, pastoral care, teaching and administration.*
 - (2) *The Chair, in conjunction with the members of the Synod in its respective Sessions, shall be responsible to the Conference for the observance within the District of Methodist order and discipline.*
 - (3) *It is the duty of the Chair to exercise oversight of the character and fidelity of the ministers and probationers in the District.*
22. The Chair, along with the other presbyters, therefore has a particular role in the shared oversight of the people of God as the people gather and disperse in

43 SO 962.

44 SO 955(7).

45 SO 974 and 963.

46 SO 400(A) concerns the nature and purpose of Districts, and the text can be found at footnote 38 above. SO 412(1) concerns the functions of the District Synod, and the text can be found at footnote 42 above. SO 431 concerns the general responsibilities of the district Policy Committee.

47 Paragraph 6.

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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. Like other presbyters, the Chair does this primarily through his or her ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility. It does not, however, mean that she or he has to take the lead in 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 Chair in the situation.

23. Chairs exercise their share in the general collective role of presbyters, but within it they also have particular responsibilities:

- They are expected to gather together any presbyters and probationer presbyters appointed to or stationed in the Circuits of the District in a Ministerial Synod. This is in order for them all to exercise mutual support and accountability by encouraging and watching over each other in their “professional” practice. As such the Chairs do not just (in the words of Standing Order 424(3)) “exercise oversight of the character and fidelity of the ministers and probationers in the District” but also allow themselves to be “watched over in love” in turn by them. The Ministerial Synod also enables presbyters and presbyteral probationers to engage in other activities to which deacons and diaconal probationers may also be invited, namely taking prayerful counsel together, engaging in rigorous reflection and a collective seeking of wisdom, and conferring about what ideas might be shared with others to promote the formulation of a collective vision throughout the District. In addition, many Districts now have meetings where the Chair of District gathers with the Circuit Superintendents and sometimes other key people in the District to confer and take counsel in their shared oversight of the church’s mission in the District. In all this the Chair is gathering and taking the lead in a group which is primarily exercising *leadership*.
- They act as the chief officer in the district Policy Committee, District Leadership team or equivalent body (although someone else may be the convenor of their meetings). These groups are made up of presbyters, deacons and district lay officers and meet to articulate vision; to formulate recommendations for practical strategies to enact that vision across the District as a whole or to encourage and support Circuits in their mission; to prepare business for the District Synod and any other formal bodies in the District, and to act in the light of their decisions.⁴⁸ They are a place where vision emerging from many quarters, not least the Circuits and the Ministerial and other groups mentioned in the previous sub-section of this paragraph, can be tested and attempts made to develop strategies for embodying it in the affairs of the District (in the sense of that term outlined in paragraph 19 above) which can be proposed to the Synod or other bodies. The role of Chairs here is therefore that of taking the lead in a group which is primarily concerned with exercising *leadership* in a context which also involves some *executive management* so far as the life and work of the District as a whole are concerned.

48 Standing Order 431.

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- They act as the Chair of the District Synod which is the chief source of governance and decision-making in the District under the Conference so far as the matters which are undertaken on behalf of the whole District, or which apply to all the Circuits within it or to none of them, are concerned. The Synod sets the parameters and structures of accountability and support for any other bodies in the District which it authorises to act in its name in such matters. It has less to do with management as outlined above, for whereas the District Synod sets the framework for any management required in the District, the direct exercise of that management is by others (e.g the District Chair and other officers) on its behalf. In extreme circumstances this might involve the Chair in appearing as the representative of the District at any legal action or tribunal concerning the actions of the District. The District Synod does, however, exercise leadership as outlined above, through its response to stimulation from the Circuits and other types of grouping in the District and through its mutual conferring. The role of the District Chair in all this is one of taking the lead in a group which is concerned with exercising *governance* in its corporate affairs but which also exercises a form of corporate leadership.
24. Chairs therefore have to be able to exercise *oversight* in general in the form of pastoral responsibility.⁴⁹ Yet from time to time they crucially find themselves exercising three of the particular facets of that oversight, namely *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 facet of oversight as is predominant in the gathering concerned. Thus they will exercise *governance* in the District Synod, when it is acting as the main governance body for the affairs of the District.⁵⁰ But sometimes they will have to exercise oversight 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 Chairs preside at Ministerial Synods or meetings of Superintendents 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 Chairs are able to recognise the differences between the various facets of oversight, and can develop the wisdom and the skill to exercise them appropriately, whilst also ensuring that they remain integrated.
25. It is also important to define the intentions of each type of meeting or gathering in the District and to ensure that their boundaries are not transgressed. The Chair of District has a vital role to play in the oversight of this, both in ordering and leading the Synod and the Policy Committee, but also in exercising some accountability to both. Where Superintendents or presbyters generally meet ostensibly 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

49 See paragraphs 14-15 above and, further, 34ff below.

50 As noted in paragraph 19 above, Circuits are not generally accountable to the Synod for their policies, and the Synod therefore does not exercise governance with regard to them, but does exercise oversight.

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lay officers in the District or the District Synod or Policy Committee) are excluded, tensions and power-struggles may arise in the District, the proper exercise of shared oversight may be neglected and power and authority may be abused. Part of the particular role of the Chair is to ensure that this does not happen, and that governance and the making of executive or management decisions occur in the appropriate places.⁵¹

26. The Chair of District also has a vital role to play in ensuring that the lay officers, deacons, presbyters and formal bodies in the District all exercise their complementary roles and share appropriately in the exercise of oversight of the Church's life, work and mission in the District and its constituent Circuits, churches and institutions, and in the wider society in which they are placed. In order for there to be a genuine sharing of pastoral responsibility between the Chair and presbyters in a Circuit there has to be a mutual relationship between Chairs, Superintendents and presbyters in which any party can initiate the conversation without undermining the authority of the Superintendent. Similarly, the Chair's role of stimulating leadership and vision about the worship and mission of the Circuits means that she or he has to be able to interact with the relevant circuit bodies and officers, without undermining their authority.⁵² At the same time, Superintendents, presbyters, deacons and the representatives from the Circuits have a role in and through the Synod and other district structures of engaging in conversation with the Chair and in helping to form the priorities for the work of the District and of the Chair. They should do so without undermining the authority and pastoral responsibility of the Chair as an expression of their part in the shared nature of oversight.
27. In exercising the oversight and responsibilities outlined above, a District Chair is not just relating to the particular context of the District to which she or he is appointed, but also to the wider context of the whole connexion. All presbyters are in a covenant relationship with the Conference, which represents and oversees the whole connexion of the Methodist Church as its supreme governing body. All are stationed by the Conference, and all are sent to particular situations in the Church and the wider world to bring the goals, insights and resources of the gospel to bear on them. Some are permitted to do so in appointments that are not in the control of the Church, but the others who are in the active work are appointed to represent the Conference, share

51 See also paras 3.13-3.21 in the report *The Nature of Oversight* (2005).

52 *SO 425 (2) It is the responsibility of the Chair to uphold the authority and rights under the Methodist constitution of the Superintendent, and to offer supervision and support as appropriate in the fulfilment of his or her responsibilities. To this end the Chair will endeavour to establish close relationships with all the Superintendents in the District, that they may have the benefits of his or her wider experience of the District and knowledge of connexional decisions and policy.*

(3) Each Chair is authorised to visit officially any Circuit in the District in order to share in the exercise of oversight with the Superintendent, circuit staff, circuit stewards and other members of any circuit leadership team, and the Circuit Meeting, and to offer appropriate leadership and support. He or she shall do so with due notice to the Superintendent and other concerned. The Chair of District may preside at any meeting for circuit or local church purposes at the invitation of the Superintendent, but may not do so without his or her consent unless, in special circumstances, the Synod or district Policy Committee so directs, and in that event the Superintendent shall take all necessary steps to give effect to the decisions of that meeting.

Standing Order 111(2) also allows the President, when requested to conduct an inquiry into the affairs of a Circuit, to delegate this responsibility to the District Chair.

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in the exercising of its oversight and serve the people in the situation to which they are sent. This is clearly the case with Superintendents and other presbyters appointed to Circuits, but it is also the case with District Chairs, and has a particular importance so far as their role is concerned. Standing Order 424⁵³ sets out the inherent duties of Chairs, as opposed to the incidental ones assigned to particular Chairs in the life of the connexion or by popular decision because they have specific gifts or expertise. Those inherent duties are primarily concerned with what the Chair does within the District. Yet as noted in paragraph 11 above, the role of Chairs in the wider Connexion has become increasingly important. Chairs are not so much Chairs *of* a particular District, in the sense of only belonging to the District and only having authority and responsibility in it. Rather they are Chairs appointed by the Conference *for* a particular District, in the sense of belonging to the whole Connexion through the Conference and as such being assigned particular functions and responsibilities in the affairs of the Connexion beyond the District because of the particular knowledge and experience they have by virtue of their office.⁵⁴

28. Thus as noted, Standing Order 424 (2) affirms a distinctive role for the Chair (albeit in conjunction with the sessions of the District Synod) as representative of the Conference and Connexion within the District. Chairs are frequently looked to by the Circuits and their officers for guidance and support or as trouble-shooters, people who can offer a knowledge of the local situation, together with their wider experience, but also an independent objectivity.
29. Equally the Chair is required by the Connexion to represent the District in the Conference, for example, in answering for the character and fidelity of ministers and probationers and in confirming that the list of ministers (presbyters) and deacons to be stationed within the District is correct and that there are no outstanding stationing issues which need to be addressed before the Conference finally stations all its presbyters and deacons for the forthcoming connexional year (i.e. in traditional Methodist language “confirming the reading of the Stations”).⁵⁵
30. This connexional dimension is underlined in that Chairs are appointed by and, while in office, serve as permanent members of the Conference⁵⁶, and their stipends are paid from central connexional budgets (whilst their Districts provide and maintain their manses, pay travel and other expenses and provide appropriate administrative support for them). Many connexional committees include a District Chair among their membership and from 2006 the Methodist Council will include four representative Chairs in its composition.

53 See para 21 above.

54 This repeats the emphasis in the 1956 report (noted in paragraph 9 above) that Chairs speak to the Districts and Circuits on behalf of the connexion, and for the Districts and Circuits in the wider connexion.

55 See SO 154.

56 Deed of Union 14 The Representative Session [of the Conference] (2) Membership: ...
(v) *The Chair of each home District.*

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31. Similarly, following the decision of the 2000 Conference, stationing policy is determined, under the Conference, by the Stationing Committee on which the stationing regions are represented. Chairs share this representation with District Lay Stationing representatives, with whom they work in partnership in facilitating the whole stationing process. The stationing procedures which came into effect following the decision of the 1997 Conference are found in CPD Book 6, Part 2, Sections 1 and 1A. In these detailed procedures Chairs, individually and corporately, now have a considerably enhanced role which involves consultation with ministers and Circuit Stewards. This culminates in their working with all the other Chairs and some other officers in the Stationing Matching Group to match ministers to Circuits and Circuits to ministers. In doing all of this they work to a Code of Practice agreed by the Stationing Committee.
32. As noted above,⁵⁷ this connexional dimension is also reflected in the fact that all the Chairs are members of the Connexional Leadership Team where they meet with others to confer, articulate vision and thereby offer leadership to the Church.⁵⁸ Their presence in this important meeting means that it is able draw on the knowledge and experience that they have between them of every Circuit in the connexion. In return they become the channels through which the collective leadership of the Connexional Leadership team can be communicated to the Districts and Circuits. There is also a separate Chairs' Meeting for Chairs alone, in which they meet with their peers for mutual support and supervision, to confer together about matters of common concern and to consider the work of God in both the individual Districts and the connexion as a whole.⁵⁹ In recent years the Conference, Methodist Council and various working parties have made constructive use of the local knowledge which is present when the District Chairs gather together by consulting them on matters of connexional policy and practice.
33. This dual role of the Chair in the District and the wider Connexion is affirmed in the fact that each new Chair is nominated by a panel representing both District and Connexion.⁶⁰ There are, however, some dangers in it. The Chair may feel unable to fulfil either responsibility effectively. He or she

57 Para 11(b) and footnotes.

58 SO 302 states that the General Secretary, who is also responsible for leading the development of the vision, mission and strategy of the Church, shall be the executive leader of a management and leadership team, which has come to be known as the Connexional Leadership Team (with the emphasis increasingly being on leadership rather than management in the sense of the terms outlined earlier in this report).

59 SO 230

There shall be a meeting of the Chairs of the home Districts not less than three times a year for the discussion of stationing issues and other matters of mutual concern and reflection upon the work of God in the Districts and Connexion. The expenses of these meetings shall be pooled and charged to the District Expenses Funds of the Districts, assisted by a grant from the Methodist Church Fund.

60 The appointment of a District Chair is one shared by the Connexion and District as illustrated in the initial Nomination Panel, e.g. SO 421A(3)

Where a new appointment is being made, the committee shall be the members of the panel appointed by the Synod (whether original or substituted), together with five persons chosen by the Secretary of the Conference from a panel appointed annually by the Conference, not being members or stationed within the District, and the President, or an ex-President at his or her request, who shall chair the committee.

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may be pulled in two directions, not just by competing demands on time from the District and the wider connexion but by the expectations and fantasies which people in one sphere of his or her responsibilities have of the other sphere. Thus when Chairs 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. Yet Chairs may also find themselves as “lone players” in both spheres. This can mean that they have nobody to whom they can delegate tasks and whom they can then manage in the execution of those responsibilities. That can result in Chairs being given notional authority and power and many responsibilities, but no means of fulfilling those responsibilities except by doing everything themselves. In other cases Chairs who have a lot of energy and personal charisma may be able to force through their own opinions. All of this can be a cause of stress and breakdown in the Chair, District or wider Connexion. It is important to find ways in which there can be a proper exercise of the shared nature of oversight as a means of seeking to prevent this.

Particular functions of District Chairs

34. As noted above, in fulfilling their role Chairs should exercise the same ministry of the word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility as every presbyter does. Yet when Chairs appointments were “separated” in 1957-8 the three aspects of a Chairman’s role then singled out were those of being the pastors’ pastor, a leader in evangelism, and an administrator. It is easy to see how the second of these might relate to the core emphasis on the ministry of the word (in its broadest sense), and how the first and third might relate to the core emphasis on the ministry of pastoral responsibility, and these are dealt with in more detail below. It is less clear, however, to see how they relate to the core emphasis on the ministry of sacrament. There are some occasions in the life of the District when it is symbolically important that the Chair presides at Holy Communion, because of his or her particular representative role. Beyond that some Chairs find that the role of Chair may not bring many opportunities for the ministry of sacrament to be exercised, although others find that they are often invited to preside when they are planned to lead services in the circuits, and may end up presiding more frequently than when they were in circuit ministry.
35. The ways in which Chairs exercise their presbyteral ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility are shaped by particular aspects of the role of Chair. Thus with regard to *spiritual leadership*, whilst separated Chairs do not have pastoral oversight of a specific church, they are regularly engaged in preaching and leading worship (including presiding at Holy Communion) on Sundays and on other occasions in the churches of the District. Chairs lead and share in worship in a variety of contexts e.g. welcome services, district, circuit and local church celebrations, Synod worship, commissioning services of various kinds, ecumenical events, ordinands’ public testimony services and other occasional acts of worship. Such visits allow for direct engagement with the ordinary experience as well as the problems and opportunities of local congregations. The presence of the Chair also provides an opportunity to link local church members with the wider Church of which they are a part.

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36. Within a District, there is often the opportunity for those Chairs who are appropriately gifted to offer specific teaching e.g. through invitations to conduct church conferences, circuit weekends; Local Preachers' refresher courses; retreats; and through oversight of and involvement in ministerial further training, probationers' studies and lay training. There is scope for initiating biblical and theological study within the District. Chairs may also do their own creative theological work and stimulate fresh thinking both within the District and beyond through writing and speaking.
37. This focus on Word, Sacrament and prayer in a wider role than that of a circuit minister may lead people within the Church and beyond to have particular expectations of a Chair. He or she may be looked to as a 'defender' of the faith. This may involve a variety of appeals relating to ethical, moral or other faith related issues: from the individual unhappy with something or other in the life of the local church to requests for comment on current headline-making topics by the Media.
38. In the current times of cultural change and challenge, there are exciting examples of new ways of 'being Church'. The Chair is uniquely placed to share stories from around the District and Connexion to offer encouragement and be a stimulus to creative thinking and planning.
39. Along with other denominational leaders in a region, Chairs have a prophetic role to influence the conscience of not just of the Churches but also of civic society, challenging decisions and actions taken by those in positions of authority and influence in the wider community. At times this will involve being a focus for helping communities when incidents of national or regional significance occur.⁶¹
40. Chairs also exercise a *representative role*. In this they fulfil their ministry of pastoral responsibility in an important symbolic way. Within the life of the Church, Circuits and other Methodist institutions within the District which are independent of district structures and are based in the wider community (e.g. Methodist Residential schools and colleges, Ministerial Training Colleges and Courses; Methodist International Houses) often look to the Chair to play a role within their life on behalf of the Church which visibly represents more than the Church locally.
41. Chairs also fulfil a role on behalf of the District and the wider Connexion and the Conference in areas outside the Methodist Church. They represent the Methodist Church in ecumenical groupings. They meet in Church leaders' groups, usually organised on a county or city-wide basis. They serve on sponsoring bodies, Churches Together councils, workplace chaplaincy committees, social responsibility boards etc. Some Chairs have signed Church Leaders' Covenants. Good relationships between Chairs, Bishops, Moderators, Senior Regional ministers and corresponding people in other denominations do much to encourage and develop co-operation between churches and ministers across a region. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant

⁶¹ Examples of such occasions have been in response to the flooding disaster at Boscastle in Cornwall and sharing in the leading of celebrations to mark events such as the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

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has offered a new impetus and dimension to this particular aspect of their role.

42. Similarly, civic authorities and secular institutions, such as universities, area health authorities and local radio, look to Chairs as the representatives of Methodism. Where the District is centred on a particular town, city or county there are often functions in civic life which the Chair is asked to fulfil.
43. Another significant aspect of the role of the Chair is that of *pastoral oversight*. Within the life of the Church, Chairs exercise their ministry of pastoral responsibility in being specifically charged with responsibility for the pastoral oversight of the ministers, deacons and probationers⁶² in the District. This is achieved in a variety of ways such as visiting, intercession, social occasions, pastoral letters, staff meetings, and probationers' retreats. Sickness and specific crises bring particular pastoral obligations and opportunities.
44. SO 425⁶³ identifies a relationship between Chairs and Superintendents and other presbyters which has to do partly with oversight and partly with mutual support. In practice, individual Chairs will meet at least once a year with their Superintendent colleagues to discuss matters of mutual interest. Such meetings offer the opportunity to develop regional collegiality, support and leadership. In some cases, this practice is being taken further with the meeting together of groups of superintendents, e.g. in county or some other geographically appropriate cluster.
45. As part of their pastoral responsibility for presbyters and probationers, Chairs have oversight of their character and fidelity and at times exercise discipline (see SO 424(3)). This responsibility was the primary ministry exercised by Chairs in the earliest days of Methodism following John Wesley's death.⁶⁴

62 SO 424 (1)

'[The Chair is]to be a pastor to the ministers, deacons and probationers ...'

and

SO724(5-6)

(5) *It shall be the duty of the Chair of the District, in consultation with the district probationers secretary, to ensure that all the arrangements for a particular person's probation are carried out.*

(6) *The Chair shall arrange for each probationer in the District to attend, in the course of the year, a retreat or refresher course or other informal meeting for fellowship and consideration of the work of the ministry or the diaconate.*

63 See note 52 above for the text.

64 See Minutes of Conference 1793, Q30

Q. Shall any alteration be made concerning the exercise of the office of a Chairman of a District?

A. If any Preacher be accused of immorality, the Chairman of the District, shall have the authority, if he be found guilty, to suspend him till the ensuing Conference, if they judge it expedient.

And,

Plan of Pacification, 1795

4. If any trustees expel or exclude a Preacher, by their separate authority, from any chapel in any circuit, the Chairman of the District shall summon the members of the District-Committee,

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However, the Chairs' involvement in disciplinary matters has changed over the years (particularly with the introduction of the current Complaints Procedures) and they are no longer required to be so directly involved in every situation as was once the case, allowing them to develop the pastoral dimension of this aspect of their ministry.

46. Chairs also provide models of what it is to exercise accountability and receive support, supervision and care. Chairs offer pastoral support to each other and engage in co-consultancy sessions during the Chairs' Meeting, and potentially have the further support of District Leadership Teams and individual Support groups. With regard to their presbyteral vocation they are accountable through the District Synod, as noted in paragraph 23 above. Ultimately they are accountable to the Conference, both individually and collectively, although further work needs to be done on how that accountability might best be exercised in practice both for their specific functions and aspects of the role that relate to their Districts, and also those that relate to the wider connexion.
47. Another important aspect of the role of Chairs is that of *facilitation and communication*. The Chair is in a unique position to know of people in one location who possess skills or experience being looked for by others elsewhere, and therefore to develop networks of collegiality, support and leadership. Similarly, one consequence of the Chairs working more closely together with Circuit Stewards in the stationing process⁶⁵ is that they have been able to draw the Circuit Stewards into meetings where they can share ideas and offer each other mutual help and support.
48. Chairs also have to ensure that there are high standards of administration and group work (including committees) in the district. The Chair presides over Synods and the district Policy Committee. The Chair is ex-officio a member of every district committee⁶⁶. The role of the Chair however is to ensure that there is proper organisation and that administration is duly carried out. The Chair has to ensure that there is proper organisation in the District so that all the Circuits, churches, institutions and other groups offer worship and participate in mission to the best of their ability. To this end the Chair 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. The Chair does not have to do it all himself or herself, but takes a lead in exercising oversight in these matters. Because the nature of oversight is that it is essentially shared, the Chair should ensure that others fulfil their proper roles. Thus the responsibilities of the Stationing process involve a significant administrative responsibility

the Trustees of that circuit who have not offended, and the Stewards and Leaders of the Circuit etc.

⁶⁵ See para 31 above.

⁶⁶ SO 402 (5) *The Chair of the District and, unless the Conference otherwise directs, the secretary of the Synod shall be, ex officio, members of every district committee. If there is an assistant secretary of the Synod he or she may attend any meeting of any such committee in the place and with the rights of the secretary in the latter's absence.*

By cl. 42(b) of the Deed of Union (Book II, Part 1) the Chair of the District is, ex officio, the chair of all district meetings having relation to the Synod.

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which is shared with the Lay Stationing Representative. Moreover, with the scope for greater freedom as to how Districts are now structured, the involvement of individual Chairs in district structures varies from one Chair to another.

49. The flexibility of District structures which is permitted by CPD⁶⁷ means that Chairs are engaged in an on-going exercise of working with District Policy Committees and Leadership Teams to explore how the District can develop and enhance its contribution to enabling the mission work of Circuits. In practice Chairs are able to bring their knowledge and experience of the wider Church and offer fresh insights and impetus to local mission activity. Such ministry has developed and expanded over time, with Chairs being invited to contribute to the life of individual Circuits as agents of change. This involves working with Circuit Leadership Teams and others to encourage the development of vision and to plan future strategy.
50. There is then the *connexional* aspect of the role of Chairs. Individually, the particular skills and expertise of a Chair are recognised through invitations to share in the work of many connexional committees and working parties. Sometimes it is the case that the Chairs' Meeting is asked to nominate a Chair for membership of a particular committee or working party to represent the Chairs as a whole. Collegially, as part of their general exercise of oversight, Chairs are involved in the task of promoting an understanding and 'ownership' of connexional priorities (e.g. the development of the 'Our Calling' process and 'Priorities for the Methodist Church') in the Circuits and throughout the District. To do this, Chairs have to take a lead in stimulating and developing vision.
51. None of the above functions is the exclusive responsibility of the Chair, but part of the shared nature of oversight in which he or she has a distinctive role. Some of the tasks for which the Chair is formally responsible are better shared with or undertaken by other people, and it is the Chair's responsibility to enable those people to fulfil them. The 2005 Conference adopted a Special Resolution amending the Deed of Union. The 2006 Conference will be asked to confirm this, and then adopt the consequential amendments to Standing Orders to be found elsewhere in the Agenda. One effect of such amendments will be to make it clear that in large Districts where the Conference authorises the provision, two or more ministers may be elected as co-Chairs by the Conference. In these circumstances, the co-Chairs will share the role of Chair between them, but one of the co-Chairs will be identified by the Conference as the Lead Chair. The same amendments, however, will also have an effect on the ability of Chairs to share responsibilities with those who are not Chairs. It will be possible for District Synods to appoint formal deputies for Chairs and co-Chairs. Any such Deputy Chairs shall have continuing responsibilities, and be able to represent and substitute for the Chair or co-Chair in appropriate circumstances and to perform other functions set out in a description of the role agreed by or on behalf of the Synod. That agreed description of the role shall also make it clear that the final authority for 'chair duties' in the District remains with the Conference-appointed Chair or Chairs. Secondly, in emergency situations or other

67 See SO 402 and 410.

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circumstances where a Chair, co-Chair or Deputy Chair is temporarily unable to fulfil his or her duties it will be possible for someone else to be appointed to undertake them for a limited period. Such 'temporary' Chairs, co-Chairs or Deputy Chairs shall be appointed by the District Synod or a body authorised by the Synod to act on its behalf. Thirdly, it will be possible for Chairs or co-Chairs to nominate assistants to help them to do their work as Chairs, provided that any requirements of the Deed of Union and Standing Orders that the Chair fulfil particular responsibilities personally are observed. Where such 'assistant' Chairs have some public role, the nomination shall be put for approval to the relevant Synod or a body authorised by the Synod to act on its behalf.

52. There is no single way of living out presbyteral ministry as a Chair. A lot depends on the individual person's particular gifts and skills. The style by which Chairs fulfil their responsibilities will vary according to the balance of those gifts and skills, their own type of personality, the personalities of those with whom they have to interact, and the expectations of people in the particular context in which they are stationed. Although Methodism has traditionally wished to emphasise spiritual equality and social democracy, there has been an implicit expectation that there will be "senior figures" amongst the presbyters in the Connexion who will fulfil the role of Chair. This expectation was there as Districts and District Chairs were established in the 1790's, and has existed ever since. But because there has been a reluctance to establish particular markers of spiritual authority, these expectations have come to be expressed through markers of social category (such as title, administrative support, additional stipend). This can lead to an office to which few outward signs of authority have been given, but from which a lot is expected.
53. As a result, the situations in which Chairs are placed and the systems with which they have to deal can sometimes lead to tensions. What is needed is the recognition that in the Church, as in any other institution, there has to be an ordering of role and power (as there is a structuring of divine power in creation and in the body of Christ) but that this should not automatically lead to separate ranks or status ('names, and sects, and parties fall'). Instead, the ordering of role and power needs to be balanced by an ordered accountability and mutual watching over one another in love as an expression of the shared nature of oversight.⁶⁸
54. So far as Chairs are concerned this requires a recognition that although they are the same as other presbyters in exercising their presbyteral ministry in a particular context, the particular aspects of that context mean that those who are appointed to fulfil the role of Chair are acknowledged as leading or "senior" figures among the body of presbyters. It also requires a recognition that in this they are not replacing but representing corporate bodies, which in Methodism have a primary role in the exercise not just of governance but also of leadership. They should therefore be supported in their role as leaders by being held accountable⁶⁹, particularly to those corporate bodies. Because

68 See further *The Nature of Oversight* 2005 sections 4.4, 4.7.3 and 5.23-28.

69 See para 46 above.

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they are human, Chairs will not be able to fulfil all that they and others would ideally like. Sometimes Chairs therefore in their turn require help, support, supervision and training in undertaking their role. The ‘good practice’ which is set out in this report is intended to provide tools and encouragement for this.

55. In summary, therefore a Chair of District needs to be:
- (a) spiritually and theologically aware;
 - (b) able to inspire people, lay and ordained, to be imaginative;
 - (c) able to empower people to develop new vision by sharing their ideas and acting upon them;
 - (d) able to create space for creativity, sensitivity and awareness within the District and agencies in the wider community, and to share the fruits of theological reflection with them;
 - (e) committed and able to create a culture in which mission is the priority, growth a possibility and the grace of God the focus;
 - (f) adept at promoting understanding of both the communities and institutions served by the District and also of the nature and activity of God, so that the District and its constituent parts can decide on its mission priorities, articulate realistic objectives and formulate appropriate strategies;
 - (g) effective in encouraging people and groups to review their existing organisation and resources so that they 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);
 - (h) highly sensitive to the way she or he interacts with others;
 - (i) effective in promoting collaborative working and mutual accountability, whilst also able to cope with the “lone nature” of much of the work;
 - (j) credible as someone who can represent the District, the Conference and the wider Connexion not only within the Church but also ecumenically and in wider society;
 - (k) adept at providing models of how power may be exercised (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love, and able to challenge colleagues and others who exercise power in other ways;
 - (l) open to the energy of the Spirit; able to inspire confidence in the Gospel of grace through his or her own spirituality, prayer, confidence, enthusiasm, happiness, and vulnerability, and through his or her Bible study and theological reflection; and adept at enabling other to be and do the same.

*****RESOLUTION**

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7/1. The Conference adopts the Report.