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SECTION A: General Reflections

1. The major theme that has characterised my experience as General Secretary this year has been 'Planning for the Future'. Some examples:
 - 1.1 The *Team Focus* process, both in relation to the Connexional Team itself and in respect of the need to negotiate and plan change in the wider Church (simply because the Team does not exist in isolation from the rest of the Church, but works in partnership – with Districts, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, other denominations, NCH, Christian Aid and the like). [*See Agenda, section 41.*]
 - 1.2 Working alongside Y Cyngor to support the emergence of new ways of working and organising things at district level in Wales, in the service of The Methodist Church in Wales. [*See Agenda, section 62.*]
 - 1.3 Developing in the Connexional Leadership Team (CLT) and in the Methodist Council the process *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission*. [*See section B of this report.*]
 - 1.4 Contributing to or listening in to a wide range of organisations, Districts, Circuits and Local Churches who are taking advantage of the changing Church culture and, with varying degrees of imagination and risk, developing plans for their future mission. Inevitably the range is enormous, from the cautious to the bold. But one small, widely-owned and much prayed-for step in some contexts will be life-enhancing beyond all expectation. The courage to change is not to be measured by the scale of the project.
2. I have tried to keep an ear open for ecumenical planning for change. There are many good examples around. Some are developing at local church level, some at circuit level, some under 'Churches Together' arrangements, and yet others at district or regional levels. I hope Conference representatives will share such experiences with the Conference.
 - 2.1 I was delighted on Easter Day to celebrate the festival in Clun, in Shropshire - in the market place, in the parish Church and in the Methodist chapel. The encouraging aspects were:

the 'spirit' of the Christian community (so obviously committed to working together, enriched by Anglican and Methodist traditions); and

the creativity with which the Christian community was attempting to engage the spiritual imagination of the whole village/town and those visiting Clun.
 - 2.2 In contrast, however, I am deeply conscious that ecumenical planning is exceptionally hard work in many places; and all too frequently, things have moved backwards rather than forwards.

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- 2.3 The Anglican-Methodist Covenant needs a new impetus. Methodists have deep in their psyche a sense of the need for 'covenant renewal'. We have to transplant that spirituality of review, penitence and renewed commitment to the ecumenical scene. *[Refer here to the interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission, Agenda section 61.]*
- 2.4 We must also re-invigorate and develop our relationships with the United Reformed Church (URC) and with the Baptist Union. The development of a Joint Public Issues Team has been significant here, bringing together resources from the Methodist Church the URC and the Baptists and creating a way of working which serves all three Churches, separately and together. In addition, on 25 April, the CLT met their opposite numbers in the URC to reflect together on some aspects of the challenge of Christian mission in 21st century Britain.
- 2.5 At local level there remain considerable tensions on ecumenical matters, in the midst of a prevailing apathy. Large numbers in our congregations have either an attenuated 'Methodist' identity or have long lost interest in any denominational label. Their ambition is to get on with being 'Christian' in today's environment, drawing on whatever resources and inspiration they can lay claim to from whatever source. We need a strategy at district and connexional levels and sufficient trust and flexibility in our relationships with sister Churches to be able to honour the spiritual needs of 'post-denominational' believers in local situations. Such 'light touch' ecumenism would need to be owned jointly by ourselves and our principal partners. We could sign up to some ecumenical objectives that make sense in local situations. And surely much of this could move forward even while the denominations, formally, struggle to develop more thoroughgoing expressions of visible unity.
3. There is a wider ecumenism to be pursued.
- 3.1 The make-up of Christian Churches in Britain is changing rapidly, most notably in London but also, in lesser degrees, everywhere. The movement of peoples around the world is an important factor in these changes. It means, among much else:
- The Methodist Church is becoming typically a multi-lingual, multi-national and multi-ethnic community. A consultation at Swanwick in February brought together for the first time representatives of many nations and languages who are worshipping in or alongside our traditional Methodist churches. Embracing this emerging reality with generosity and openness is vital. We must commit ourselves to find ways in which people of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds participate fully in the life of our Church. The international Methodist community is now our domestic community.
- The Methodist Church needs to develop, with confidence, new relationships with the Churches in the Pentecostal tradition.

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The Methodist Church, working with our traditional ecumenical partners, must work more flexibly and speedily if we are to connect into, learn from and add to, what the black-majority Churches are doing to bear their social witness, especially in the areas of justice, non-discrimination and social cohesion.

- 3.2 The vocation to befriend all, at the heart of Methodist spirituality, was never more important than in the multi-faith context of British society. Friendship implies breadth of imagination and empathy. How do we 'befriend' strong currents of fundamentalist conviction in the Christian tradition and other world faiths in Britain? What constructive contribution to social cohesion can we make when some people of faith find every aspect of our modern society an offence and a threat to their faith? And what if, in extreme situations, a sense of threat and persecution from society – and from our 'liberal' ways of being Christian – generate a vocation to martyrdom and violence directed to the very heart of our society?
4. And so to the widest vision of ecumenism – the whole inhabited world, and the planet itself. [The Conference will have an opportunity to debate climate change – *see Agenda, section 29.*]
 - 4.1 This brings me to what I believe is pivotal to the mission-challenge that faces us today. It springs from reflection on *Our Calling* and *Priorities for the Methodist Church*. These remain key texts which inspire and guide our shared vision of what God is calling us to be and to do to share in God's mission in 21st century Britain. They need to be in front of us whatever we are doing or planning for the future. ***[The texts are reproduced in section C of this report.]***
 - 4.2 At the heart of the *Priorities* is an 'overriding challenge'. The brief paper on this theme which was before the January meeting of the Methodist Council is reproduced in ***section D of this report***. I hope the Conference will have opportunities throughout its Sessions prayerfully and reflectively to discern where God is at work in the world today, and in the Church; and to explore what sort of witness to God's presence and action could be constructed so that the question of faith becomes a credible and compelling option for women and men who have no knowledge of the Christian tradition. I am convinced that dedicated attention to discernment and witness requires of us all a confident but critical embrace of the world's cultures but at the same time an energising rediscovery of the riches of the Biblical traditions.
5. As I look back over a year of planning and reflection, I am clearer than ever before how critical is good leadership in every part of the Church. In our tradition, corporate bodies lead the Church (the Conference, the Methodist Council, synods, circuit meetings and church councils). But their leadership capacity is enhanced when the competence, confidence and courage of individual leaders are recognised, affirmed and encouraged. None of us can predict whom God will raise up to lead God's people. We all need the grace to recognise such a gifting and vocation when it is given to the Church. Once they have been duly authorised, leaders must be trusted to lead in an authentically Methodist way. Let leaders lead! That is what will

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make all the difference, especially in an era of rapid and radical change.
[See Agenda section 20.]

David G Deeks

***RESOLUTION

2/1. The Conference receives the Report

SECTION B: *Mapping a Way Forward: Re-grouping for Mission*

This task has arisen from a number of pieces of work in the Methodist Council, in 2006/7 and 2007/8. This brief report summarises the outcomes. This report also anticipates some of the Team Focus proposals which are before the Conference.

6. The Task

Over the coming 5 years or so, each District is to encourage holistic and wide-ranging circuit reviews, in the light of *Our Calling and Priorities for The Methodist Church*, with a focus on discerning and developing:

sustainable and relevant circuit structures which will serve and oversee the mission-obligations of the Church in the early decades of the 21st century;

new ways for Circuits to fulfil their responsibilities and purposes in line with Standing Order 500: 'The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help'.

Such circuit reviews are to include strategic consideration of the availability and use of personnel, finance and buildings.

7. The presuppositions

7.1 The necessity of a mission-focus throughout the process.

7.2 Each District will be starting the process from a different place; respect must be given to Districts to develop the style and pace of their reviews in accordance with their different cultures, ecumenical environments, social and economic contexts, and available resources.

7.3 A Circuit is most straightforwardly the primary unit within which mission and mission strategy are facilitated when a Circuit coheres with a natural community of identity and belonging.

7.4 Districts are to be accountable for their oversight of the circuit reviews in terms of the encouragement Districts provide, the training and advice they offer and their reporting of the outcomes.

8. A 'connexional' process

8.1 'Vision-meshed-with-reality' must drive change. The vision needs to be a shared vision. It will emerge with clarity as each and every part of the connexion contributes to and learns from everyone else. The Conference is the overseer of this process; and it is the Conference which articulates vision for the whole connexion in an authoritative way.

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- 8.2 Towards such a shared vision, the Council has directed the Connexional Leadership Team to take the lead in developing, as an integrated process, the task outlined in paragraphs 6 and 7.
- 8.3 The Council has directed the CLT to liaise with the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) every six months or so, so that the SRC can report progress annually to the Council, from spring 2008 onwards.
- 8.4 The CLT will be responsible for developing good practice in all the Districts, for encouraging creativity and flexibility and for sharing experience and insights across the Districts.
- 8.5 Districts Development Enablers (DDEs), who are to be employed in Districts from 1 September 2008 over the anticipated 5 years or so needed for the task, will be able to assist the Districts and the District Chairs in their leading of *Mapping a Way Forward: Re-grouping for Mission* in their individual Districts.
- 8.6 The networking and conferring among the DDEs and among members of CLT will assist the sharing of experience, insights and good practice.
- 8.7 The CLT will bring together perspectives and outcomes emerging from the circuit reviews in all the Districts and liaise with the SRC on the form that a summary overview might take and on appropriate forms of accountability for the individual Districts.
- 8.8 The Council has encouraged the CLT to utilise the skills of a Project Management Group established by the Connexional Team. The task of the Group will be to co-ordinate the development and monitoring of the task across the connexion, with sensitivity to the different district contexts. The District Chairs will be consulted about the detailed terms of reference of the Project Management Group.

9. Review of the Districts

- 9.1 The Council proposes that the present pattern of Districts is sustained more or less in its current form for five years, to be the stable network of oversight structures within which circuit change is explicitly encouraged.
- 9.2 During these five years, ongoing cross-district co-operation and sharing of resources are encouraged wherever possible. Further development of district structures may emerge, in the spirit of the changes in the south-east area of England (the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire, London and South East districts) and in the Methodist Church in Wales. The very small Districts may network together and substantially link their life with neighbouring larger Districts. All this is to happen through natural evolution and 'light touch' encouragement.
- 9.3 In five years' time or so, the Conference will be invited by the Council radically to review the district pattern and structures, to discern what is needed for the following decades.

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SECTION C: *Our Calling and Priorities for the Methodist Church*

10. The purpose 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' (Conference 1996).
11. Since Conference 2000 the *Our Calling* process has provided four interconnected themes within which Local Churches and Circuits may review their life in fulfilment of this purpose. The themes also help them to make plans or set targets to develop their worship and mission. Thus the church exists to

Increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love (worship).

Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care (learning and caring).

Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice (service).

Make more followers of Jesus Christ (evangelism).

12. The *Our Calling* process has released many hopes and dreams for the whole Church, and identified some fundamental challenges for Christian presence and mission in 21st century Britain. The Conference of 2004 resolved to harness the energy and imagination of Districts, connexional bodies, churches and Circuits in response to these hopes, dreams and challenges. It therefore approved the following *Priorities for the Methodist Church*.

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world;

and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer

Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide

Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved

Encouraging fresh ways of being Church

Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

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SECTION D: Challenging Priorities

This short paper sketches a vision, inspired by Priorities for the Methodist Church, which is widely shared. It was before the January Council and is now before the Conference

- *to stimulate Conference members to ponder whether there are features of our vision which strike a chord with their experience and their conviction of God's call to the Christian movement in general, and the Methodist Church in particular, in 21st century Britain;*
- *to encourage Conference members to share with one another their vision of what the Spirit is asking of the Church today, in the light of the Priorities.*

Introduction – Questions and Convictions

13. For all of us, there are questions arising in our everyday experience which prompt us to reflect on what the Spirit is asking of the Church today. For example:
 - A British Airways employee is told to conceal her cross. Some think Christ has been demeaned. Some think religious tolerance has been promoted. The Archbishop of Canterbury notices crosses on sale in BA's duty free catalogue. Church and society appear confused about the place of the principal Christian symbol.
 - The most recent study of people coming to Christian faith in Scotland reports that almost all had respect for the Bible. But almost none found it helpful: "hard-going"; "incomprehensible"; "absolutely impossible". All needed an interpreter.
 - In a Devon chapel on Christmas Eve the preacher was asked to drop the traditional carol service and repeat the previous Sunday's nativity play. Not because it was sentimental and twee: it wasn't. Perhaps because all involved made sure it was as professional as it could be. More likely because its first song was about food shopping at ASDA and buying underwear at M&S: the play connected life as we know it with Bethlehem.
14. Our conviction can be put simply: God's infinite, faithful Love undergirds everything that exists. God is at work, pursuing the divine purpose of Love, in every part of the universe that God has brought into being. This holds true whether or not we or anyone anywhere believes it. Everywhere and consistently God longs to release into the life of the world the mystery of God's incomprehensible and holy energy.
15. Included in that fundamental conviction is this truth: God's grace envelops, supports, guides and seeks to transfigure every Christian disciple, every Christian group, Church or Church-based project, anywhere and everywhere in the world. We are recipients of such divine goodness. So we praise God every day for God's patience and generosity in dealing so kindly with the British Methodist Church in all its parts – the

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lively and the dull, the inspirational and the routine, the confident and the insecure.

Overriding Challenge

16. What is the overriding challenge posed by this conviction for Christian mission in 21st century Britain? It has two aspects: discernment and witness.
17. Where and how do we *discern* God's loving actions in the midst of the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows of our personal lives? Or in the cacophony of messages, programmes of action and political manifestos which batter our hearts and minds through the media? How do we *discern* God's message and love as good news for all, when there is so much pressure on us, in our post-modern society, to concern ourselves only with personal or local truths?
18. And if we can discern God's words and actions, how do we *witness* to them in ways that make sense to ourselves and to our contemporaries? How do we speak, in everyday language, about our convictions? What can we do to communicate effectively something of what we have glimpsed of God's presence in the world?
19. And how can we be sure that what we *discern* and the *witness* we make to what we have discerned are truly Christian? We believe that in the Bible there is a unique and authoritative message about God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and a witness to it in stories of a world and of individual lives transformed. But the Bible is largely a closed book to people in our generation. And, if the truth were told, it is hard for contemporary Christians to make sense of its stories and vocabulary.
20. This 'overriding challenge' for Christian faith and mission is at the heart of *Priorities for the Methodist Church*. It is there referred to as renewing confidence in 'God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world'; and 'God's presence and action in the world and in the Church'.

How do we meet this overriding challenge?

21. We need to go on two interlinked journeys of exploration and discovery. On the one hand, prompted by the Spirit, we need to probe more deeply into the Bible and the ways in which it points to Jesus Christ. And we need to allow our lives and the life of the Church to be reshaped and refined around what the Spirit is saying to us today in and through the discipline of digging ever more deeply into the Bible and into Christian reflection on it over the centuries.
22. On the other hand we need to engage as deeply as we can with the many cultures all around us. We need to discover 'from the inside' what makes people think and feel and act as they do, how they find their values and meanings – usually without any reference to God at all. We need to deepen our understanding and develop the gift of empathy for ways of speaking and living that may sometimes puzzle us or even be offensive to

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us. Though not always! For not all of the sub-cultures that make up contemporary society are strange to us. We belong to several of them. They give colour and shape to our lives.

23. There are many metaphors that can throw light on these two sorts of enquiry: we have already used the metaphors of 'going on a journey' and 'digging deep'. We could have said it is a bit like 'learning a number of foreign languages' or 'translating backwards and forwards between a mother tongue and one or more dialects or languages' or 'listening intently to different sorts of instruments in a jazz band'.
24. It's crucial that all the time we look and listen for links. Entering more deeply into the biblical witness and getting beneath the skin of a local culture can illuminate or resonate with each other. Suddenly we see that two things that on the surface have nothing in common connect to each other. 'This' is about 'That'! We find ourselves wonderfully caught up in what someone once called 'explosions of hidden likeness'. Or, to cite words attributed to Jacob in Genesis 28: 'Truly the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.'
25. Illustrations abound of insights arising when dialogue is established between the Christian tradition and the many cultures around us. Think, for example, of what happens when we bring together the classic Methodist talk of personal and social holiness and the contemporary political and legal passion about human rights. It is out of such engagements that God both deepens our understanding of God's will and empowers us to live in the Church and in the world in obedience to God's will.
26. One sobering observation is that even in the organisations and groups that we are part of in the course of our everyday lives (including the Church), we often struggle to make connections between the things that matter to us and our faith. How much more difficult it is to make links with sub-cultures which we know little of, let alone to find ways of speaking of God and faith there.
27. It is when things come together from different sources to create new harmonies that faith is born and life is transfigured – for others as well as for ourselves. The four aspects of *Our Calling* then come alive. Perhaps we think we could have **Worship** (of a sort) without having to understand the culture around us. Perhaps we think we could give **Service** without having much clue about the language of Christianity. But key to the *Our Calling* process has always been to see the need for all four sides to be held together and expressed by each Methodist community. So we only respond fully to God's love when we also **grow and learn as Christians**, which certainly requires us to understand both the tradition of faith and the culture around. And we will not **make more disciples of Jesus Christ** unless we can explain our faith and advocate it persuasively to those who are outside the Methodist sub-culture.
28. It is surely the work of God's Spirit to have confronted us with this overriding challenge, springing as it does from *Our Calling* and *Priorities*

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for the Methodist Church. No part of the Church, in any part of Britain, can today avoid this 'overriding challenge'. Facing up to it profoundly alters what we expect of one another in our discipleship. It also compels us to work together, with urgency and commitment, to change the Church. That means that those of us who are Methodists have to work in partnership with others wherever possible (to quote *Priorities for the Methodist Church* once more). But we also need to do it as ourselves because in doing so we are fulfilling in the present age our original calling as a Church to be a movement of lay disciples supported by a few ordained disciples - gathering together from time to time but living most of their lives as dispersed Christians in the many sectors of the contemporary world, there to discern God's actions of love and to witness to them in word and deed.

29. We have much to do to help one another better to discern God's activity in everyday life and to witness to it effectively; and much to do to reclaim credibility for the Church as an institution. We have to dispel false and negative ideas about 'religion' and 'faith' (however widespread they are) and build public trust in our desire to serve the common good and not just our own interests.

Pointers to the Future

30. Already there are hints and pieces of good practice to celebrate as key pointers to the future.
31. The interim report on 'evangelism and speaking of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved', which was widely circulated in the Church early in 2006, insisted that 'evangelism, apologetics and the nurture of discipleship and a culture of Christian conversation within congregations are strands that need to hang together as we seek to renew our confidence in God, in our faith in God, and in our ability to share our faith in God appropriately'. The following objectives were identified for the Church:

The Methodist Church is seeking:

to increase confidence in evangelism across the whole Church, not just the parts with a traditionally evangelical approach

to enable more lay people who feel confident and empowered to speak about their faith to others while still being lifelong seekers themselves, and who are able to help others become attentive to the kingdom of God

to discover gifts and release resources for evangelism and speaking of God and faith within a renewed movement in which lay people take a lead

to encourage churches (whether fresh expressions or mainstream) to become more welcoming and offer real nurture in discipleship as a lifelong journey for all

to identify and appoint more people who are trained, equipped, deployed and supported for the work of evangelism and apologetics.

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32. Further illustrations of well-established initiatives in engaging confidently and imaginatively with our complex and rapidly changing society, to meet the 'overriding challenge' are:

The refreshment of some local churches, focussing on the essentials of *Our Calling* with a determination to make the local church hospitable, welcoming, accessible, engaging and profound - thereby creating new possibilities for mission and worship.

The development of fresh expressions of Church, touching groups and communities that have no living contact with mainstream church life and work; and a wide range of other projects, sponsored by churches, Circuits, Districts or the Connexional Team, which facilitate connections between the Church and people who play no part in the life of the Church – people making their way in life without reference to God; people in need; or groups which are dedicated to community development or campaigns for peace, justice, development or ecological responsibility.

The intentional concern for and engagement with organisations and institutions in a neighbourhood, covering all sectors of society: certainly encouraging Christian people who play a part in or work for such organisations; and sometimes leading to the provision of chaplaincy (lay or ordained, informal or formal) in those organisations and institutions.

The imaginative attempt to understand the ferment in some parts of society in the area of 'spirituality' (however defined), to engage with it and to bring the resources of the Christian tradition to initiate constructive dialogue with it.

Conclusion

33. These illustrations express the response of Methodist people, working with others, to *Our Calling*. They are at the heart of *Priorities for the Methodist Church*, which has sprung out of that process and programme. We are at the position where some things have already been done, some insights have already emerged and other ideas and insights are gestating. There is much more to be done to engage the whole Church in putting into practice the *Priorities* and meeting the overriding challenge that we have referred to here.

APPENDIX

From vision to a programme of change

The Conference is the final authority in the Methodist Church. But the Conference does not act in an authoritarian manner. It governs the Church so as to maximise, for the good of the whole Church, the godly and creative contributions of individual disciples, churches, Circuits, Districts and connexional bodies. So the Conference is unlikely to impose a programme of change in the Church, as its response to the vision God has given it. But the Conference does have the responsibility of overseeing the whole Church, in all its variety, and of

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encouraging communication, networking and the sharing of resources and good practice, so that authoritative innovation in one part can stimulate comparable obedience to God's prompting in another part.

Since 2004, when the Conference adopted *Priorities for the Methodist Church*, it has repeatedly called on all parts of the Connexion, in consultation with one another, to discern what is entailed in putting the *Priorities* into practice. Sometimes the whole Church has responded in unison – as in the disciplined contributions to the Year of Prayer. More typically, there has emerged a mosaic of smaller, more localised attempts to fulfil *Our Calling* and apply the *Priorities*.

If now, at the heart of the *Priorities*, we identify an 'overriding challenge', it becomes a challenge we must help one another to meet in every church, Circuit, District and connexional body and in all the many groups, organisations and communities in which individual disciples live out their everyday lives.

It is one thing to make such a commitment. It is another thing to put in place the resources and procedures that can genuinely help people to fulfil that commitment; and yet another thing to remove the blockages and distracting systems and structures that prevent people fulfilling that commitment. But the Conference must attend precisely to these 'second order' issues if its primary desire – to see the *Priorities* applied everywhere – is to be achieved.

While, therefore, there is no 'grand plan' of change to reinforce the Church's prayer and action in response to the gospel, through the *Priorities* and the 'overriding challenge', the Connexion from time to time agrees to significant processes of change, which affect everyone to some degree, to move the Church forward in support of its mission.

It is helpful to try to see these laid out together, because they begin to provide an overarching picture of a Church on the move to coherent renewal. Important examples include:

- The commitment, wherever possible, to work in partnership with others, illustrated in one instance by the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.
- The decision to inaugurate a thorough review of stationing policy for ministers and deacons, and more widely of a deployment policy for lay and ordained leaders.
- The decision to review radically what a Circuit is for, to look in depth at the best possible use of locked-up resources in Circuits (including buildings) for mission and, over a five-year period or thereabouts, to look at the number of Circuits we need in 21st century Britain to support and lead the connexion as natural units of mission.
- The decision to co-ordinate into appropriately-resourced regional clusters a rich range of training providers and enablers, to equip all God's people for effective participation in worship and mission.
- Decisions which together sketch a set of moral and spiritual commitments for contemporary Methodists: they draw on good practice in the everyday life of the world, but are imbued with the vitality and grace of the gospel. Consider here: commitments to racial justice, the co-dignity of women and men, the overcoming of violence and to peacemaking; resistance to ageism; advocacy of the joy we have in diversity in every part of the Church (including the particular challenge of living with contradictory convictions)

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and in all aspects of wider society; the holding together of global concerns for justice, peace and development with local community concerns (especially generous care for the poor and needy). And all this underpinned by a refreshing spirituality.

- The reviews of governance bodies (the Conference and the Council) and disciplinary procedures, to ensure that they operate effectively and efficiently, utilising good secular practice and modern technology as discerned through our theological perspectives.
- The constant encouragement of lay leadership in worship and mission, through vocational discernment and effective personal development, and the clarification of roles for well-trained ordained officers of the Church.
- The provision by the Conference of a Connexional Team which is fit for purpose (when judged against the *Priorities* and the overriding challenge mentioned above), flexible (as is necessary in our rapidly changing society) and innovative – a resource to support and inspire the rest of the Church.

Is all this too much change too quickly? That is unlikely, because to do less (and even worse, to do nothing) is to court disaster for the institutions and traditions which have nourished Christian faith in the Methodist way in Britain. The alienation of the Church from the complex, multi-faith, multi-racial, and multi-cultural society that Britain has become very rapidly is hard to overestimate. Yet our conviction about God's love in action *for the whole world* constantly unsettles us and prompts us to make response! God will not let us collude with that alienation or settle for half-hearted responses. Thoroughgoing change, urgently pursued, is what God is asking of the Methodist Church, so that we become an effective, confident and joyful agent of discernment and witness in our world.