

55. Methodist Diaconal Order General Report

Contact name and details	Deacon Karen McBride Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order mdowarden@methodistchurch.org.uk
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Our life together as deacons and members of the Order

Membership:

The Methodist Diaconal Order has a complement of 241 members.

131 in the active work (including seven diaconal probationers, one ordained probationer and four diaconal ordinands)

100 supernumerary deacons

Seven diaconal students

Three deacons hold 'without appointment' status

In addition:

One authorised deacon and one associate deacon in the active work

One supernumerary associate deacon

Thirteen 'Associate members' and a number of 'Friends' who commit to support the Order through prayer and advocacy.

Since the MDO report to the Conference 2022:

- four full members and three MDO Associate members have died;
- three diaconal probationers have been received into Full Connexion and full membership of the Order, and ordained to the diaconate within the universal Church;
- three people were accepted as candidates for training in 2022 and six further candidates will be recommended to the Conference 2023;
- 11 members are seeking the permission of the Conference to 'sit down'.

The reviewing of the MDO Mission statement:

In common with the disciples of Christ everywhere, travelling the recovery-road post Covid 19 pandemic, we continue to seek to support and serve God's world, and to pray for the agility and strength to be open to new opportunities to reveal God's love for all the world.

We were grateful to the 2022 Conference for its positive response to the review of the MDO Rule of Life and its acknowledgement of the work and commitment members had put into this review to ensure all voices could participate well. With this foundational work accepted and affirmed by the Conference, the MDO has been able to give attention

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to its Mission statement, which the Conference had also invited us to review. This work was ably directed by a small working group of the Order and undertaken by all using the MDO Area Group system. This work was recently completed at the Convocation and is presented below to the Conference for its affirmation.

MDO Mission Statement:

Methodist Diaconal Order is a Christ-centred, prayerful, pioneering Religious Order committed to modelling God's love in action.

- **Christ-centred:** The MDO is inspired by and seeks to live out Jesus' ministry of love and service.
- **Prayerful:** The MDO is committed to living prayerfully, and to pray for the Church, local community, and wider world.
- **Pioneering:** The MDO seeks to enable the Church to find new ways and contexts in which to share the gospel.
- **Religious Order:** The MDO is a dispersed community that lives by a Rule of Life to enable mutual prayerful support through Area Groups and Convocation.
- **Committed to modelling God's love in action:** The MDO seeks to model God's love through spoken word, practical action, nurturing people and local communities, and challenging injustice.

Convocation:

The overarching theme of the 2023 Convocation was 'God for All', recalling for us the connexional strategy for Evangelism and Growth, as we expand our commitment to be a growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking Church of Gospel people, and also reminding members of the commitment we make through the MDO Rule: *"We recognise God's image in all that God has made; we welcome and celebrate the gifts and talents of all. Through our diversity we gain a greater insight into the kingdom of God."*

We were delighted that the President of the Conference, the Youth President, the Assistant Secretary of the Conference and two District Chairs accepted our invitation to attend and participate in the Convocation. We were enabled in our exploration of the theme by members of the Evangelism and Growth team and those enabling us as a Church to embed more deeply the gospel imperative of justice, solidarity, and dignity for all. In addition, we were thankful to have deacons from other global and ecumenical contexts, to challenge and enlarge our own insights and perspectives.

We gave thanks and remembered those sisters who had died in the past year and celebrated the three members who were received into Full Connexion with the Conference, became full members of the Order and were ordained at the 2022 Conference.

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We recognised the ministry of those seeking permission of the Conference to become supernumerary this year and heard their testimonies. Among those was Deacon Myrtle Poxon, whose active ministry of 45 years spans both that of the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Methodist Diaconal Order. Myrtle's testimony and ongoing loyal service remind us of the rich heritage of prayer, witness and service which undergirds the Order. As an Order we pay tribute to Myrtle and all our Sisters of the Wesley Deaconess Order whose obedience, costly service and lifelong commitment continue to influence and enable the life of the Methodist Diaconal Order today.

The Conference Diaconal Committee met during the Convocation, accepted the obituaries of those who had died and recommended to the Conference candidates for acceptance into initial formation and training; students and probationers to continue on trial; probationers to be recommended for reception into Full Connexion, full membership of the order and ordination as deacons; and those who are seeking permission to 'sit down'. The Committee's report is presented elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

The 2023 Conference is the twenty fifth anniversary of the Methodist Church recognising two orders of ordained ministry – presbyteral and diaconal. In 1998 the Conference saw many members of the MDO travel to Scarborough and stand in the gallery as deacons were received for the first time into 'Full Connexion' with the Conference. We recognise that even 25 years on there is ongoing work to do, yet there is much to give thanks for, not least the most recent work in 2019 which re-affirmed and celebrated the Methodist Diaconal Order as both a religious order and an order of ministry.

It was fitting in the light of this anniversary for the Convocation to celebrate Deacon Kerry Scarlett as Vice-President designate of the Conference, to pray with her and offer our support and commitment to her in the year ahead.

In the closing service each member, whether full member, probationer or student was required to re-affirm their commitment and willingness to take up the opportunities, obligations, and privileges of diaconal ministry in God's Church and our shared life within the community of the Methodist Diaconal Order. We did so, trusting in God's help and grace to enable us as individuals and as a religious order to live the life of those called into a life of prayer and a ministry of witness and service.

Our relationship with other diaconal orders and deacons

After the years of Covid 19 we give thanks for being able to meet 'in person' with other diaconal orders and associations. Convocation included guests from the diaconal order of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, the ecumenical Community of Deaconesses in Rwanda and ecumenical deacons and guests from the Scottish Episcopal Church, United Reformed Church. and the Church of England.

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In August, the Order's summer retreat will be led by colleagues from the Scottish Episcopal Church.

In September two members of the MDO will travel to Neuendettelsau, Germany to participate in the Diakonia Region Africa-Europe conference: Hope in a fragile world.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 55/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 55/2. The Conference resolves that the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall meet at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire from Tuesday 7 May until Friday 10 May 2024.**