



Welcoming Lay Preachers from other traditions

GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STANDING ORDER 566A

Recognising the calling of a preacher

The responsibility for discerning the call of a Local Preacher lies with the Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting¹. This responsibility includes those who have become members of the Methodist Church in Britain², but whose training and experience were obtained in other contexts, either in Britain or overseas. Standing Order 566A provides a process to help Local Preachers' Meetings to discern with a lay preacher whether they should be recognised as a Methodist Local Preacher. This Guidance Note is offered to help circuit Local Preachers Meetings to apply SO 566A in their own context.

When does this guidance apply?

The standing order applies where someone who has already practiced in a recognised role as a lay preacher or "reader" in a different church or denomination, and has participated in whatever training was offered in their previous context. This recognises that many denominations or church groups recognise lay preachers, but do not have a specific training programme for this purpose.

When does it not apply?

Standing Order 566A does **not** apply where someone has engaged in theological education (e.g. by completing a Diploma in Religious Education or a theology degree) but has not previously trained or held a recognised role as a lay preacher or reader. In these cases, the normal training process for local preachers applies, but allowance can be made for previous theological education. The process for this is called ***Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL)*** and is covered by Standing Order 565B. For more information please refer to the APEL Guidance Note, which also includes an Application Form.

Similarly, Standing Order 566A does **not** apply to recognised lay preachers and readers of other denominations who wish to serve as local preachers in a Local Ecumenical Partnership and are not members of the Methodist Church. Standing Order 566B applies in these cases.

How does the 566A process work?

As well as overseeing the training of Local Preachers, the Local Preachers' Meeting is responsible for working with people to discern their call to preach. There is a well-defined pathway for Local Preacher formation and training which involves the issue of a Note to Preach, a period On Trial and completion of the Worship: Leading & Preaching course.

This pathway recognises that some people become members of the Methodist Church having already practiced as lay preachers or readers in another part of the Christian Church, and wish to explore a call to be Local Preachers in the Methodist Church in Britain. It aims to take account of their previous experience and training, whilst recognising that a process of discernment is appropriate, together with an opportunity for orientation to the role of Local Preacher.

Standing Order 566A provides a number of steps to assist the Local Preachers' Meeting in the discernment task. It also provides for a period "on trial" to allow the prospective Local Preacher to gain understanding of Methodist ways and complete any recommended reading or study to

¹ Or Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Meetings or other locally-used name. The term "Local Preachers' Meeting" is used here as per Standing Orders.

² Where the term "Methodist Church" is used in this Guidance Note, it means the Methodist Church in Britain.



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supplement their previous training. It also recognises that every case and every context will be different.

What does the Standing Order require?

The text of Standing Order 566A is given *in italics*, followed by explanatory notes:

(1) Local Preachers' Meetings can recommend to the Circuit Meeting that it approve the admission as local preachers of lay preachers and readers of other churches (including officers of the Salvation Army) who have become members of the Methodist Church, provided the training procedures they have undergone meet the Methodist Council's training specification.

This Standing Order applies to lay preachers and readers of all Christian denominations. Where there is doubt whether a given denomination or church grouping falls within the definition "Christian Church", guidance should be sought from the Connexional Ministries Team.

Worship: Leading & Preaching (WLP) is the authorised training course for Local Preachers in the Methodist Church in Britain. The term "the Methodist Council's training specification" should therefore be taken to mean "equivalent in scope and content to WLP."

To help Local Preachers' Meetings to compare the candidate's previous training with the scope and content of Worship: Leading & Preaching, a table is provided in the Appendix. This is designed to help both the preacher and the local preachers' meeting to discern whether any further reading or study would be helpful to supplement previous training.

Before recommending admission the Local Preachers' Meeting must satisfy itself on the following points:

(i) the standing of the candidate in the other church;

A letter of recommendation should be sought from a person in leadership (e.g. minister or pastor) in the most recent context where the candidate has exercised a preaching ministry. It is recognised that in some cases (e.g. if the person arrived in the UK to seek asylum from religious persecution) this may not be possible, although character references should still be sought. In such a case, the On Trial period (item (2) below) takes on even more significance in the discernment process.

(ii) that its training procedure was successfully completed, as to which, if possible, written evidence shall be required;

Written evidence of previous training is ideal here, but note that formal training courses for lay preachers are the exception rather than the rule. In some denominations, training may be offered ad hoc or according to local availability and needs. Also, within denominations, training can vary widely across dioceses or regions. Also, note that course descriptions may provide an indication of the scope of the course, but not the student's engagement with it.

The attached table lists nine key topics covered by Worship: Leading & Preaching. It can be used as a checklist to help Local Preachers' Meetings to decide whether the training requirements in S.O 566A(1) have been satisfied, and to identify what further study is appropriate.

If, for example the preacher comes from a different church tradition, it would be good to read about "Methodist Identity". If the preacher has not come across exegesis, one or both of the WLP exegesis sections would be appropriate. Note that Continuing Local Preacher Development (CLPD) is part of the responsibility of a local preacher, so establishing a "learning habit" is helpful.



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If the Local Preachers' Meeting has difficulty deciding whether the training requirements have been satisfied, the Local Preachers' office can arrange for an online meeting to take place, to discuss previous training, identify gaps and make recommendations for supplementary training.

Normally, this meeting would involve the candidate, a representative from the circuit, a Learning Network officer and/or experienced Local Preachers' Tutor, and will be held by video at a convenient time. Please contact localpreachers@methodistchurch.org.uk if you would like to explore this possibility. A completed Training Checklist should be provided prior to the meeting.

Note also that whilst formal training is helpful, it forms only part of the formation of a preacher. This should be taken into account in the overall discernment process. The final decision remains with the Local Preachers' Meeting.

(iii) that satisfactory information has been obtained on the circumstances in which the candidate may have ceased to be a preacher in the other church (if that is the case);

Many lay preachers who move, do so for reasons of employment, relocation, or because they sense a new direction in their discipleship. Furthermore, for many people, denominational affiliation is just one of many factors in to consider when joining a church. This question should be explored, probably in an initial conversation with the Superintendent, and with full pastoral sensitivity. If any concerns arise, account should be taken in the decision.

(iv) that the candidate will not preach anything at variance with our doctrines;

Initial reassurance may be sought on this, but the question may be difficult to answer, especially if the preacher comes from a different Christian tradition. If the candidate is a very recent arrival in the Methodist Church, it is good practice to encourage them to attend worship and listen to a range of preachers before committing themselves to this process. They may in the meantime discover aspects of Methodist emphasis and practice that do not fit with their understanding.

All local preachers, at their Admission Service, have to affirm that they will preach nothing contrary to our doctrines. The period on trial provides an opportunity for them to gain an understanding of Methodist doctrines and satisfy themselves and the local preachers' meeting that they are comfortable making this commitment.

(v) that the candidate satisfies the safeguarding requirements of the Methodist Church;

This is absolutely essential, and includes a DBS check and attendance at Safeguarding training courses as required for all local preachers in training, in accordance with current requirements.

(vi) that the candidate is known to other members of the meeting who can support the application to become a local preacher.

Again, this underlines the value of a period of orientation as a person "on trial" as in (2) below. This gives the candidate an opportunity to become part of the fellowship of preachers in the circuit and become known around the circuit. Feedback on services they lead whilst on trial will also provide evidence for this measure of discernment.

(2) Pending a decision of the Circuit Meeting on a recommendation made under clause (1) above candidates may at the discretion of the Local Preachers' Meeting be granted 'on trial' status, but they shall be subject to the requirements of this clause and clauses (1) above and (3) below in place of those of Standing Orders 564A(7), 564B, 565 and 566(1) to (4) above.



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A period “on trial” is included in local preacher training as a period of “probation” or “orientation” during which the preacher can carry out all the functions of a preacher, but under the caring oversight of the Local Preachers’ Meeting. This period (typically 6 months) is particularly valuable for newcomers to the Methodist Church as it allows them to find their feet and learn about our ways of worship and practice. Formal Trial Services and Interviews (as required within the Methodist training programme) are not necessary, but the opportunity for conversation and testimony at the Local Preachers’ Meeting (see clause (3) below) is encouraged.

Quarterly assessed services, as conducted by all local preachers in training are recommended, as is the use of the [Service Planning and Reflection Form](#)³ and the collection of feedback from other preachers and congregation members. All of these should be used as appropriate to support the discernment process.

The “on trial” period also provides an opportunity for any recommended reading or study to supplement previous training, as per clause (1) above.

Note that in some instances, the candidate may (at least initially) feel a call to preach in a particular congregation or church with which they are associated (such as a particular language- or cultural-based fellowship). Where this is the case, arrangements should take account of this and suitable opportunities for feedback and reflection provided within that context.

(3) In every case there shall be a conversation at the Local Preachers’ Meeting conducted by the Superintendent or a preacher appointed by him or her to satisfy the meeting on the points referred to in clause (1) above. In particular, the candidate shall have read A Catechism for the use of the People called Methodists and this document should form the basis of the conversation.

Gracious conversation forms an essential part of the discernment process and forms an opportunity for the local preachers of the circuit to get to know the candidate better. The conversation should provide opportunity for the candidate to share something of their testimony, their sense of call and their journey towards the Methodist Church. Whilst the Catechism is a helpful starting point for discussion, this should not be seen as an oral examination on the catechism, and other books or resources on Methodist perspectives may be helpful.

If the preacher has engaged with elements of the Worship: Leading & Preaching course as suggested above, they may be asked to reflect on this. The aim of the conversation is to satisfy the meeting that the candidate has a call to preach in the Methodist Church in Britain, and has the character and competencies expected of a preacher of the Word.

(4) Any person approved by the Circuit Meeting under clause (1) above shall be admitted as a local preacher at a public religious service to be arranged by the Circuit Meeting and Standing Order 566(6) and (7) above shall apply.

A new Local Preacher who follows this route should be admitted and welcomed in the same way as a local preacher completing the Methodist training programme. This would normally take place in a Circuit Service. Prior to this, the Local Preachers’ Secretary should inform the Local Preachers’ Office so that the records held for the new local preacher can be updated. A letter signed by the President of Conference, and a bookplate will be issued for presentation at the service, as for all newly-admitted Local Preachers. Adequate notice is required to ensure this can be done in time.

³ Available from the Local Preachers’ Secretaries webpage at www.methodist.org.uk.

Key Study Topics from Worship: Leading & Preaching (see item 1(ii) above)

| Topic | Where studied? | Academic level ⁴ | Date completed | Evidence provided ⁵ | Key WLP material ⁶ |
|---|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Biblical Studies – the origin, development and interpretation of the various kinds of literature of the Bible, including study of particular biblical books. | | | | | 2.1, 5.1, 5.2, 8.1 |
| Exegesis – the close reading of scripture and its interpretation through history and in contemporary world. | | | | | 2.1, 5.1 |
| Worship – the development different traditions of Christian worship from New Testament times to today, and worship in contemporary Methodism. | | | | | 2.2, 2.3, 3.3 |
| Preaching – the communication of the gospel through the spoken word including various forms of preaching today. | | | | | 5.3, 6.2, 6.3, 7.3 |
| Theology – how we speak of God and God’s actions in the world and relationship with humankind. | | | | | 1.2, 6.1, 7.1 |
| Mission & Evangelism – the response of the Church to the gospel in outreach, evangelism and social justice. | | | | | 3.2, 7.1 |
| Methodist Identity – the place of Methodism in the story of the Christian church and its particular insights and charisms. | | | | | 3.1, 6.1, 6.2, 7.2 |
| Different Voices – engagement with a range of diverse theological approaches such as liberation, black, feminist, post-colonial. | | | | | 4.1, 4.2, 8.2 |
| Spirituality –awareness of the importance of personal spirituality in discipleship and calling. | | | | | 1.1, 1.3, 4.3, 6.2 |

⁴ For example: , Correspondence Level 3 (e.g. A level), Level 4 (e.g. HNC), Level 5 (e.g. Foundation Degree), Level 6 (e.g. Bachelor’s Degree).

⁵ E.g. Certificate, course transcript or syllabus, letter from Tutor. If possible the evidence should show topics covered.

⁶ Suggested content from Worship: Leading & Preaching to supplement previous study.